

The Rise Of A New Storm

A Stranger Things
Fanfiction



The Rise of a New Storm by LeoMac315

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Summary: Things seem to be coming back to normal at last and life in Hawkins is simple again, but the peace only lasts until an unknown force shakes the town's calm atmosphere at the local fair. Old enemies emerge from the shadows, new dimensions are revealed, Steve finds yet another unlikely partner and Dustin meets his beloved companion once again.

1. Prologue

A/N: I sure put a lot of time into this fanfiction. I really hope you enjoy reading it!

"What you can do in Incredibile. It makes you very special, Jane" – Kali Prasad.

February 8th, 1985. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Raymond Curt wandered through the corridors with large, though sluggish steps. The keys attached to his belt jingled along with the rhythm of his torpid march. His black boots produced little dry taps every time they hit the grey concrete floor, but the sound was surpassed by the dozens of voices that came from behind the iron bars and filled up the air in the prison interior. Some sobbed, some mumbled to each other and a few ones occasionally screamed. The dark-blue uniform he wore offered little protection against the chilling cold of the very end of the winter.

Almost all of his co-workers had left, but he and a few more officers stood in the place for the nightshift. Compared to what that building was on busier days, it could be said that it was relatively quiet, with fewer people inside the cells than usual and no other guards to interact with. It was almost like the very walls emanated cold and emptiness. Not for the first time since he had been working there, Raymond felt like *he* was the one who was trapped.

"It's alright, Ray", the nearly bald man mumbled with clenched teeth as he shivered "Just two more hours until weekend".

"How about we shorten that time?"

Raymond's hand went to his holster and sprung back with a pistol on it. The voice came from mere inches behind him, sudden enough to startle the man and shake off the somnolence and the cold from his body.

The voices around had changed. Some of the ones that screamed now went quiet. Some of the ones that sobbed and mumbled were now screaming. With an instinctive move, his hand went to his holster and sprung back with a gun in his fingers. Some of the inmates pointed at something, others yelled like they were talking to someone a few feet away from Raymond.

But there was nothing there.

Raymond looked all around, with the gun still in hands and quickly scanned every inch of the prison. The people around refused to go quiet.

"Shut up, will you?", he ordered to the inmates, with little response but some swears he was used to hear every few hours.

The guard stretched his neck to get a slightly clearer view of the corridor, but he saw nothing. His next instinct was to look inside the cells, but all the prisoners around were men.

"What the hell?", he mumbled to himself, putting the gun away.

"Big mistake", the voice returned just as he put the pistol back in the holster.

Four brick walls blossomed from the floor all around Raymond and blocked the pale lights of the jail. A solid ceiling was formed on top of the walls, throwing the man into complete darkness. Before he could recover from the shock, a vague silhouette appeared in front of him, which caused him to blink a few times, trying to discern the shape in the darkness that felt almost solid inside the brick confinement.

"Peek-a-boo!", she said with a mischievous smirk on her face.

He jumped back in horror and reached for his gun with shaky hands. He was about to pull it out of the holster when a surprisingly fast and strong fist hit his face and his body went numb. Unable to do anything against it, he didn't witness as the keys and the pistol were taken from him. The fingerless gloves of the hand that carefully checked every pocket, every compartment of the man's clothes in

search of useful tools or props weren't long enough to cover the little tattoo on the girl's wrist: *008*.

"I would *kill* you right now, but I'm trying to be a better person from now on", Kali said, wiping the blood from her nose "For my sis".

She looked around to make sure no one but the confused and alarmed inmates saw her and started running down the hall.

"Way to go on that getaway, Mick", Axel's sarcastic words joined the chaotic choir of voices of the other people in the hall.

The man rested his head against the wall and opened a crooked smile with his misaligned teeth. His colorful Mohawk had faded to a dirty yellow tone due to the many days he had been unable to preserve it. Now his hair leaned to the right side of his head like a bizarre fringe.

"Oh, was it *my* fault now?", Mick responded to the provocation.

"Yeah, it was and you know it!", the pale man snapped "You should have turned right when Dottie said so instead of driving straight!"

The woman scratched her head, sinking her fingers in her wild afro.

"Oh, not this again!", she said, looking away in frustration.

"Oh, yes, *this* again. You know it was *your* fault!"

"They shot our tire, you asshole!", she defended herself "They were going to outrun us eventually!"

"So what, you just thought 'screw it' and kept driving straight?", Axel said, looking down from the ceiling right into Mick's eyes.

She got up from the thin mattress that served as one of the four beds of the claustrophobic cell and raised her voice:

"If you're so good at getting away from the cops, then why don't you do it from now on?!", her voice echoed through the long corridors with striped iron walls.

"Yeah, maybe I should!", Axel shouted, spitting his words on his leader's face.

"Guys!", a fruity masculine voice called.

Partially shocked by the sudden interruption, the thieves stood still and looked to the corner of the cell, where a very tall and robust man with a little yellow goatee that contrasted his dark skin color sat on the floor with his legs crossed. He wore a light blue t-shirt and a pair of jeans.

"It's not Mick's fault. We did have the time to escape", Funshine said "Or at least we would have, if someone didn't stop to chat with her little sister".

The man's usually calm behavior had changed drastically since the events of the past months. He had never been through the experience of getting arrested and it had been a large shock to him. To aggravate his helpless anger, Dottie, the second youngest of them all, had been shot during the failed attempt of getting away from the cops and died a few minutes later. All of them were deeply sorry for the loss, but Funshine had felt a much bigger weight, as if he had failed to fight for his friends.

Axel let out a humorless laugh and sat back on his bed.

"You're damn right, buddy", he said "That little bitch cost us way too much time. It was her idea to go out again and avenge her mom or whatever the hell we were supposed to do".

Mick crossed her arms and leaned against the wall, pressing her cheek against the concrete.

"Well, Kali has no fault that the damn kid ran off", she said, looking at the rows of cells filled with people across the hallway.

"Then what? We should just forgive her even after she got away and never came back for us?", Axel asked, angrily throwing his hands up and letting them fall back to his seat "We're just going to pretend that the little brat didn't leave us to rot here?"

"I didn't leave anyone", said a much younger voice.

Axel flinched when a teenager girl with piercing black eyes and a long haircut that fell to her back like a crest simply appeared out of thin air in front of the cell, proudly displaying a bunch of keys like a fishing trophy on her right hand with a proud smile on her face. She wore the very same black overcoat and the same gloves she wore on the night she met Jane. The man laughed again, it was a loud guffaw full of humor this time.

"You nimble little slut", he said "Why'd you take so long? I thought you weren't going to show up".

"Give me a break, Axel. I had a rough time getting in here", Kali explained.

"Nice job, Kal. I always knew I could count on you", Mick said, holding one of the bars.

"What's wrong with the big guy?", the young girl asked, glancing at Funshine.

The man sat still on the corner. He somberly stared at the floor like a sorry kid and didn't show any reaction to Kali's presence. Mick looked at him and shook her head.

"He's mourning Dottie. Give him some time", Mick explained, looking back at the girl.

Kali closed her eyes and nodded, then moved away from the cell and put the keys on the pocket of her jacket.

"What the hell are you doing?", Axel asked.

"It's just... I need a huge favor from you guys", the girl said, calmly picking up the keys from the pocket and moving them through her fingers.

Mick frowned and stared at Kali, challenging her to stare back. She accepted the challenge with a devilish grin on her face, like an eagle that knows it's about to catch its helpless prey.

"What are you talking about? We're forgiving you for screwing us up! That's our favor!", Mick started to talk in a very low voice, but raised

her tone as she spoke.

"You better listen if you want those, Mick", the other girl said, playfully making the keys spin with her index finger "I want to leave the gang".

"It's your call", the watcher had raised her tone to the point of almost screaming as she stretched her hand beyond the bars to get the keys "You know we won't stop you".

"Yeah, but if I simply *leave*, it won't do much good for me. I want five thousand bucks in cash and a car", Kali demanded.

Mick pursed her lips and kicked the bars as hard as she could with an expression filled with hatred on her face, making the iron rods shake and fill up the air with a metallic clank.

"Fine! Just give me the god damn keys already!", she asked.

"Here ya go!", Kali said, throwing the keys to Mick.

The group leader caught them in the air and quickly started to try them in the lock. It took a few failed attempts before the right key slid in and let itself turn to the right with a dry click. Once the door was open, Mick discarded the keys and walked outside, gesturing for the others to follow her. Kali walked up to her and crossed her arms.

"Now I want my part of the deal", she said.

"Not happening, Kal. I know you want to go back to that little bitch you call your sister", Mick spoke "Fun?"

Without thinking twice, Funshine grabbed Kali by her arms and threw her against the wall. His anger drove his hand from her right arm to her neck.

"What's wrong with you? We were supposed to be a family, to stand up for each other!", he yelled.

"Bad decision, Kal", Axel said with a gloomy smile "You know we don't really need you, right?".

"Wrong...", she managed to hiss despite the iron strong grip of Funshine on her neck "I don't need you... You bunch of assholes".

A cloud of black smoke emerged from the floor and involved them, obscuring their sight from all sides. It took each one of them a terrifying moment before they realized it was Kali who was doing it. A gunshot was heard and Funshine yelled. Another two shots pierced the air and Mick and Axel felt the impact of the bullets in their legs.

The smoke faded.

"I tried to give you all a chance", Kali said, rubbing her aching neck. Funshine's hands had left a red mark on her throat.

She threw the gun away and it hit the floor with a dry thump of metal against concrete. On the ground, Mick stretched her hand to grab it, but the younger girl simply kicked it to the side and it slid all the way down the corridor until it hit a wall.

"Little bitch!", Mick yelled in pain.

Kali knelt next to her former partner and looked her in the eyes.

"I'm going to find Jane with or without you. Don't come after me", she said in a dangerously low tone.

She got up to leave when the guards arrived at the opposite end of the corridor, drawn by the gunshots. They didn't seem to see her, however. Instead, they ran down the hallway towards the three wounded inmates to check on what happened, giving commands through their radios and scouting the place in search of the invisible shooter. Kali walked away like a ghost, trying to ignore the screams of her former gang as she left them behind. She didn't need them where she was going.

Next Chapter: El is adapting to her new life as the chief's daughter and she's still struggling to accept Max as her friend. Meanwhile, Hopper receives some unusual news that could mean that the battle against the Upside Down isn't over just yet.

2. Chapter One - After The Storm

[A/N] Hey, everyone! Thank you for reading my fanfic so far and supporting my work. Let me know if I should continue this story!

"When is soon?!" – Jane Hopper.

Hawkins, Indiana.

He felt a pair of tiny hands gripping his shoulder and shaking him on the couch. Half conscious and still unaware of what time it was, he said something unintelligible and rolled to the side. The hands kept angrily shaking him.

"Dad", a young feminine voice softly called.

Sara.

Hopper opened his eyes and gasped in shock. The overwhelming astonishment only last for a moment before he recognized that he was on his couch at his house in Hawkins. That place wasn't Indianapolis and the little girl who desperately tried to wake him up sure wasn't Sara. He didn't know exactly how to feel about it.

"Stop, it, kid!", he mumbled "Just a few more minutes, alright?"

An invisible force held Hopper by his arm and it violently pulled him to the side, comically causing him to fall off from the couch to the floor. Once out of the couch, he untangled the blanket from his legs and looked up at Jane. She wore a purple sweatshirt and blue jeans instead of her pajamas.

"Hey, what have we talked about the powers?", he asked in a reprehensible tone as he supported his hand on the coffee table and got up from the floor.

"Late", she said.

Hopper immediately looked at his watch and frowned.

"Oh, shit!", he said, walking past the kid towards his room.

The house by the lake had never looked so tidy before. The usual cans of beer ashtrays had been replaced by flower vases, picture frames that contained the few photos that Hopper and Jane had taken in the short time she had been allowed to interact with the outside world and a little fishbowl on the table next to the TV on which a tiny goldfish called Eggo – The name was chosen by the girl –, peacefully swum around with no certain route.

The chief was never fond of animals, but he figured it would be good for Jane to have a pet so she could learn about responsibilities, even if all it took to keep Eggo alive was feeding it once a day and cleaning the bowl once every two months.

The clothes that would usually be scattered around the place were now folded inside the drawers in Hopper's old bedroom, which now his daughter occupied until the man could afford another bed. The old bookshelf was moved from the cabin and now it stood beside the couch, holding many books Jane would sometimes pick up and try to read, despite being unable to read most of the difficult words she'd eventually find in them.

Hopper opened one of the drawers and picked up his uniform. He was starting to take the white shirt and the pair of jeans he wore, when his eyes met Jane's silent facial expression full of expectancy.

"What's the matter, kid?", he asked.

"Movie", she said "You promised".

What a father I am, he thought as he closed the door to change his pants. He had promised that he'd take her to the movies that weekend when she asked him about the matter, but he would not have remembered it if she didn't.

"Y-yeah", he opened the door and put the police shirt on "Look, I should've been more specific about that. I have to go to work today, but I can take you la...".

Hopper felt a nearly physical sting on his heart when her curious face full of expectancy faded to a disappointed frown. Just like the words 'lie' and 'promise', the words 'later' and 'soon' had a heavy meaning to the girl and he had to be careful when using those. He headed to the bathroom, where he started brushing his teeth.

"Oh, come on, kid. I'm gonna take you tomorrow, okay? I won't have to work at all and if Flo calls me, I'll tell her I'm spending some time with you. I'm sure she'll understand", he spat the toothpaste in the sink and turned the tap off.

El nodded, but she didn't change her expression. Whenever he promised her a perfect scenario in a near future, she'd usually suspect something was off. He didn't always kept his promises and had the awful habit of getting late for almost everything. Still, the girl struggled to believe him.

"Alright, see you tonight, kid", he said, patting her head and walking to the front door.

"Will I have to stay?", she asked without moving from her place.

Hopper was already holding the knob, ready to turn it, when she said that. A heavy guilt fell on his stomach like an ice cold rock. The cop still remembered Owens' warning about taking the girl outside before one year had past, but he knew how much she had been through. Keeping her inside any longer would be painful to her. That's why he'd take her out whenever he had the opportunity to do so, but with some understandable limitations.

He knew how much Jane hated being inside the house during the day. Of course, she loved reading books, watching TV and having the special classes Mr. Clarke gave her almost every evening, but that only worked for a couple hours before it started to get old. Whenever Hopper left the girl in the house and came back at night, he could see the upset look on her face and it wrecked his heart.

He let go of the knob and turned around.

"Actually, I was thinking uh...", he started in his slow and clumsy way to try to fix things with words "Since it's Saturday and you pretty

much have the whole day free, why don't you spend the day at your friend Michael's house and I come back at night to pick you up?".

A smile lit up her face and her heart started racing like she was about to go on a little adventure. Hopper didn't get to see Jane grin like that very much, but when she did, it was kind of magical. He couldn't help but let a childish smirk appear on his own face.

"Alright, go brush your teeth real quick before we leave, okay?", he said and the girl ran to the bathroom, where she picked up a little pink toothbrush and opened the tap.

As Hopper watched the excited girl brushing her teeth as fast as she could, he tried to fight back the tears, which proved to be harder than fighting those dogs that crowded the lab back in November.

How long had it been since he had seen his little girl smiling at him like that? How long had it been since he had to tie his daughter's shoes or to tell her to eat her dinner before it got cold? How long had it been since he had been a father? The chief sighed, leading his shaky hand to his pocket to get a cigarette, but he detained it. He had *promised* her he'd quit smoking.

He had to stop promising things.

"Alright, kid, hurry up! I'm gonna be late!", he barely had to say it before she came back from the bathroom and ran up to him, standing still as if silently telling him she was ready to go.

It was Hopper's time to grin. It didn't matter how long it had been since he had a daughter, he still felt like a million bucks when he saw that look on his little girl's face.

"That doesn't sound good...", Mike said with urgency.

"Ah, crap! I knew it was too simple!", Dustin spoke, throwing his hands up in the air in a vague gesture of frustration.

"What doesn't sound good?", Will asked.

"Th... This hissing... It's like it's coming from *everywhere...*", the

dungeon master said in a low voice that demanded silence from the rest of the group "But the forest is clear, there's nothing in sight".

"Goddamn it, Mike, what is it?!", Lucas asked, slamming his hands against the table.

"You don't know", the boy answered with a tricky smirk on his face "You only know it's near".

"Screw it, I'll roll a perception!", Max grabbed the red D20, threw it on the table and smiled when she saw the result "Seventeen, Wheeler".

Surrounded by boxes of junk food – Most of them emptied by Dustin –, the Party played Dungeons and Dragons. It had been a while since they last played the game, mostly because Mike never managed to come up with a decent plot for their adventures while El was gone, but now with things as normal as they could get and with a brand new member added to the Party, it felt like the right time to get the old game out of its box once again. It took them some time to teach Max how to play, but once she learned all the rules she turned out to be an excellent rogue.

The girl was developing her skills at the game in a frighteningly fast rate, turning out to do better than her friends during most fights. For their the sake of their dignity, Lucas, Will and Dustin claimed that she was only lucky to get high numbers in the die rolls, but deep inside they knew that she was way better than them at that game, too.

Mike blinked, a bit surprised by the smart move of his friend and adapted the narrative to the new circumstances.

"MadMax looks up, mistrustful of her surroundings, only to see a lizardfolk that was perched on a branch jumping at her with a knife on each hand!", he continued, placing a little plastic piece shaped like a biped lizard on the board.

"Well, shit", she said, dropping back on the chair and thinking of her next move.

"I'll shoot fire arrows at it!", Lucas promptly said, grabbing the D20.

"Are you kidding me?", Dustin asked "Don't waste fire arrows on it! We don't know how many others can it be!".

"*Waste?!*", the other boy repeated "Uh, I'm pretty sure that I'm about to save Max's life right now".

"Okay, then you'll run out of fire arrows!", Dustin complained.

"What's so bad about it?", Lucas asked.

"Nothing, just don't come crying for Will to revive you after you die".

"Lightning bolt!", Will yelled, hastily grabbing the die from Lucas' hand and throwing it on the table.

The D20 bounced on the board a few times until it finally stopped and showed the number painted white on one of its sides.

"Holy shit, it's a 20!", Max said.

"Boo ya!", Will celebrated, giving little punches in the air, which was an unusual reaction for him.

The Party laughed and celebrated for a few joyful moments until Mike decided it was time to get back to the narrative.

"Will the Wise raises his staff and points it at the creature while it's falling. His arm follows the huge reptile like it is being drawn to it. The wizard's eyes go bright blue and a wave of blinding light comes out of the orb of the staff. A mighty lightning pierces the air towards the lizardfolk, making the roaring sound of a hundred thunders, and...!", the boy raised his arms, ready to slam his hands against the table.

"Michael!", Mrs. Wheeler opened the basement door and called from upstairs, unknowingly destroying the climax of the kids' adventure.

"Mom, we're in a crucial moment of our campaign!", the boy said, turning around on his chair to face his mother.

"I know, I know", she said almost comprehensively "But Hopper is here".

Without a word, Mike left his chair and hurried upstairs as if Hopper would leave if he didn't arrive soon enough. Actually, the chief wasn't his main concern at the moment. Sure, he was a badass and helped the Party and Joyce countless times. The man even fought dozens of demodogs by himself. Despite all of that, Michael wasn't excited to meet him *at all*.

But he knew that when Jim Hopper showed up, so did Jane Hopper.

A foolish smile appeared on his face and it refused to leave when he saw her standing at the front door, next to the imposing figure of the chief.

"Mike!", she said softly as if they had been apart for another year and wrapped him in a warm hug.

"Hey, El", he spoke, hugging her back and searching for her lips.

"Alright", Hopper said, gently unwrapping the kids' hug before they kissed "Hey, buddy. I figured she'd like to spend the day here while I'm working. Hope you don't mind", he tried to open a friendly smile.

"No, not at all!", the boy cheerfully "Actually, the guys are over here, too!".

Jane gasped in excitement when he said that. Being outside was good, being outside with *Mike* was amazing, but being outside with Mike and all of their friends together, that was indescribable.

"Good. I'll pick her up at eight. And you...", Hopper said, now looking at the girl "You behave here, respect Mrs. Wheeler and remember...".

"...No powers", she completed, looking up at the man.

"Exactly. No powers. See you later", he said, ready to turn around and head for his jeep, when he felt her hugging his chest.

"Goodbye, dad", she said.

Caught by surprise, Hopper found himself instinctively hugging the girl back and kissing her in the head.

"Alright, bye, kid", the cop said, letting go of her.

Feeling his eyes starting to water, the chief patted the girl in the head and went back to the jeep that was parked on the cul-de-sac on which Mike lived. Once in the vehicle, he let out a deep and heavy sigh before turning it on. The light-brown Chevy K5 Blazer growled to life and Hopper drove it away from Maple Street, vanishing from their sight in a corner.

"Can we kiss now?", she asked, looking at Mike.

He chuckled.

"Yeah, I think so", he said.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and stood on the tip of her feet to reach his head and give the boy a quick peck on the lips. They both smiled afterwards and just kept looking at each other for a few seconds.

"Hey, Mike! What are you doing up there?!", Dustin asked, interrupting their little moment.

"I think we should go", Mike said.

Jane simply nodded and slowly untangled their hug. They walked downstairs and El looked around the basement, smelling the familiar scent of wood that hovered in the air inside. The cozy room felt like it hadn't changed anything since the day she left, which made the place feel a lot more like home than most of Hawkins. Her little fort still stood up on its corner like her own cozy little Castle Byers and Mike's toys, even though they were fewer in number, were scattered around, simply laying on the furniture, since that was the only room of the house that Mrs. Wheeler didn't clean twice a week. A lonely lamp on a corner threw a warm and welcoming yellow light over the four kids who sat around the table.

"Hi, El", Dustin greeted her.

"Hi", Will spoke.

"Heya" said Lucas.

"Hello".

Jane's eyes stopped analyzing her surroundings when they met *her*. Max looked at her, offering the girl the kindest of her smiles, but it was received with only a silent death stare from Jane.

"El?", Mike asked, noticing that Eleven had stopped walking.

"Yes?", she replied, looking away from Max.

"Um... Is everything okay?".

Jane looked once more at Max in a silent promise that she wouldn't forgive the other girl at the first mistake she made and then back at Mike.

"Yes", El said and continued walking.

Mike pulled off an old blanket that covered a chair in a corner and put the chair right next to his seat so the girl could sit down at the table.

"El, you got here just in time!", Lucas said, rubbing his hands together
"Will just rolled a 20 on a lightning bolt!".

"And here you were, trying to shoot fire arrows at it", Max said
jocularly to the boy.

"I could have gotten a twenty, too!", he defended himself.

The redhead rolled her eyes.

"My hero", she jested.

"Alright, let's get back to the game. We still have a lot to cover today", Mike said, sitting down and preparing to continue the adventure "El, if you don't get something, feel free to ask me".

She nodded.

"Okay, so, Will the Wise feels a familiar jolt on his arm as the electricity flows from the orb of his staff towards the lizardfolk. It hits the creature in the chest and throws it back in the air. The shocking wave scatters through its whole body...!".

Jane didn't fully understand what Mike was saying, but she didn't care about the story at all. Her main concern was the girl in a red shirt who sat between Lucas and Will. Whenever she was around, Jane felt an unknown feeling very similar to anger igniting inside her. Max had appeared in their group while she was gone and became friends with Mike and the boys. Wasn't a friend someone special? Why was that girl be special to them?

As Michael kept speaking, Jane tried to draw her attention away from Max. Special or not, she meant a lot for the boys and Jane didn't want to make them sad. Especially Mike. Being near Max was bearable. Being without Mike wasn't.

"Jesus, chief. It's almost lunch time. Are you trying to break a record or something?", Powell asked from his usual spot on the table on the center of the main office of the police department, where he casually read a magazine.

"Give me a god damn break. I had to drop Jane at a friend's place", Jim said, walking past the little gate next to Florence's desk and making his way to the donut box, on which only a couple more of those were left.

"I'll never get why you decided to adopt another kid, chief", Callahan said with his feet supported on the table, next to a pile of books.

"Yeah, I... I didn't mean to adopt her at first, but it all ended up... I dunno, I figured she needed a home", Hopper spoke, grabbing a plain donut from the box.

The story Jim had told his friends and co-workers was that Jane was a girl who went missing at a very young age and presumably ran off to another town to become a street girl and eventually found her way back into Hawkins. Hopper had supposedly found her in the woods not too long after and decided to take care of her and give her a

home. It seemed to be a pretty believable story for most people in Hawkins.

"Well, yeah, but it's weird that you'd want another kid *at all*. You barely talk about the other one", Callahan continued.

Powell was desperately gesturing for his partner to stop his sentence while mouthing 'Don't!' repeatedly, but his efforts were in vain and the damaged had already been done. The chief bit the donut.

"Yeah, you wouldn't like to talk about family if yours was torn apart, you dickhead", Hopper spoke with his mouth stuffed "I'll be in my office".

Flo got up from her desk, ready to put out the cigarette she assumed he'd be smoking – Since he had the habit of smoking at work every day for the past five years –, but for her surprise, the man didn't have it. Leaving aside that little shocking moment, she simply tapped his arm to call his attention.

"Jason Allen called this morning. He said a bear killed his dog during the night. The poor man is comfortless", she announced.

Hopper swallowed.

"A bear?", he asked.

Florence nodded.

"Is he sure that it wasn't another dog? I mean, winter has barely ended", the chief insisted.

"I don't know what it was, but Jason seemed to be pretty sure that it was a bear", Flo said, straightening her glasses.

He went silent for a few seconds. The last bear attack report had been in the winter of 1977, two years before Hopper returned to Hawkins. To make the unlikely news even more concerning, Jason lived away from the northern portion of the town, where bears were a more common sight. Instead, he lived in the middle-west portion of the town, near...

Mirkwood.

"Hey, chief, you okay?", Powell asked, looking up from the magazine.

Hopper looked at the officer only to find out he had been standing there and absorbing that information for several seconds without saying or doing anything. He gave another bite on his donut.

"Yeah, I'm alright", he said "Flo, call Jason. Tell him I'll be on my way".

"Really, chief? What's gotten into you this morning? You'd usually delay it as much as you possibly could", Callahan added before Jim left.

Hopper turned around and gave the man a deep stare Jane herself would envy.

"You're trying really hard to piss me off today, you know?", he said before leaving.

Florence and Powell gave Callahan a reprehensible look.

"You can't just be quiet for five minutes, can you?", Flo asked, coming back to her desk.

"What?", Callahan asked defensively.

Powell rolled his eyes and drove his attention back at his magazine. He didn't consider himself a very intelligent man, but even he knew better than pissing off the chief. Callahan had been working with Hopper ever since the chief showed up and he still had a lot to learn.

Next chapter preview: With the amusement park arriving in town, Jonathan takes this opportunity to ask Nancy out on a date, but something strange happens when she least expects it. Hopper finds something weird in Jason Allen's case, but he just can't point his finger to it.

3. Chapter Two - Truesight

[A/N] Woah, I didn't expect to have so many followers on the first chapter. That's the best response I've ever got to one of my stories so far! Thank you everyone for the reviews, favorites and for simply readinf this fanfiction! I'll makre sure to keep this story exciting!

"You know, it... It can't get us in here"

"We don't know that" – Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler.

"Ugh, I can't believe we paid to see that!", Nancy said, unbuckling her seatbelt.

"Yeah, I didn't think it would be *that* bad", Jonathan agreed in an apology tone "I should have just taken you to the ice cream store or... What's so funny?".

The two teenagers were parked in front of the Wheeler's house, back from a very tedious afternoon at the Hawk cinema. The couple had watched what was meant to be a romantic comedy, but ended up being a very lame excuse for a movie. Not so great of an experience for their fifth date.

Now Nancy smirked at Jonathan, looking deep into his eyes.

"It's kinda cute how you think that everything is your fault", she said.

"But it was!", he laughed a bit, resting his head on the seat and looking at the ceiling "That was awful".

"No, it was not", Nancy denied, laughing as well "I had a good time, actually".

Jonathan shook his head.

"It could've been better", he said.

"Stop worrying so much. It wasn't bad", she spoke, opening the door "Okay, I have to go. I have a huge pile of homework to do and I'm screwed if it's not all done by Monday".

"Hold on. Before you go...", Jonathan reached into his pocket and pulled a tiny orange ticket out of it "I was wondering if you'd like to go to the fair tomorrow. I know it's a cliché, but maybe it'll be better than today".

A cheerful gasp escaped from Nancy's lips and she couldn't help but grin. An amusement fair had recently arrived in Hawkins, which was a pleasant surprise to the town, where such events were so scarce. Needless to say that both kids and adults were excited about it. Obviously, Mike and his friends had planned on going to the festival for months.

The girl remembered going to a fair when she was five and Mike was only a baby. It was an absolutely magical night that would never fade from her memory. Of course, she was planning on eventually buying her own ticket with the money left on her piggy bank – Which had abruptly decreased after Mike 'borrowed' her money to spend on the arcade – , but going to the fair with Jonathan Byers was infinitely better than going with her geeky little brother and his friends.

She looked at the boy who stared back at her, still holding the ticket and noticed that he waited for her response.

"Yeah! It'll be great!", sounding just as enthusiastic as she felt.

She picked up the ticket and put it in her purse.

"So... Can I pick you up at three?", he asked.

"Sure, I think so. I'll call you to confirm just in case", she confirmed.

He nodded and a heavy silence fell upon the car while the two teenagers awkwardly stared into each other's eyes. Nancy moved closer to him and her action was reciprocated by the boy until they were mere inches apart from each other.

"I guess you need to finish that homework...?", Jonathan broke the silence.

Nancy blinked twice as if she had just woken up from a trance.

"Huh? Oh! Yes, right... T-the homework", she nodded "I... See you later. Bye".

"Bye".

The teenagers shared a quick and shy kiss before Nancy moved away and got out of the car. Jonathan smiled as he watched the girl walking through the garden and only looked away after she got in the house and closed the door behind her.

That's when he angrily punched the steering wheel.

"You need to finish that homework? Really?", he mumbled to himself, getting increasingly self conscious at the phrase that ruined what could have been a romantic moment between him and his girlfriend "What's wrong with me?"

Nancy gazed at the ticket on the corner of her desk maybe for the fifteenth time in five minutes while she tried to focus on answering a biology question related to photosynthesis. Before she knew it, she was already picturing herself and the boy walking among the many colorful tents that would sell food while kids would try to knock down piles of cans with tennis balls in exchange for stuffed toys.

With a silly smirk on her face, she forced the jolly thought to fade away and looked back at the book in front of her, trying to focus on the question. And so the minutes went on obeying to that never-ending cycle of obsessing over the upcoming date and achieving some slight progress on the homework.

Then, it happened.

Nancy was looking at her notebook when it started, focusing on yet another question, so it took her a few minutes for her to look away from the table and notice everything had stopped.

There were no birds chirping on the trees, no dogs barking far away in the distance, no cars lazily sliding down the street. The only signs that she was able to hear at all was the dry little noise of the tip of

the pencil against the paper as she wrote and her very breathing.

Noticing the chilling silence, she looked up from the desk and then all around her room. Inevitably, her eyes caught the spores floating outside the window.

The tiny white specs hovered outside like ashes, swirling in the slight breeze. They seemed not to fall straight to the ground, but to aimlessly wave up and down. At first, she assumed that it was snowing, which wasn't something unusual to happen in February in Hawkins, but then she noticed they were *in* the room as well. Nancy didn't have enough time to decide what to think of that before the world shook and everything went black.

Nancy had only seen the Upside Down once over one year ago, but she could never forget how it looked like: pitch black vines such as the ones she had seen at the lab covered all surfaces including the ceiling and tangled themselves up around everything they touched. The ceiling light and the lamps on her desk and on her nightstand flickered on and off, providing a slight lighting on that grim environment.

Somehow, that felt worse than last time. Back in 1983, when she crawled into the portal in the woods and found herself in that dark realm of emptiness, she was in a forest, surrounded by trees and with no sign of civilization around. This time, it was right *there*, in her room, the safest and most private place for her on Earth. If it could reach even there, then where else could she hide from it?

Nancy tried to scream, but all that came out was a muffled sob of despair and she took her hands to her mouth. Her eyes started watering and her legs felt weak. That shouldn't be happening. That couldn't be happening.

With her hands shaking, Nancy opened the door and hopelessly rushed downstairs. The lights near her flickered at each step she gave. She could feel the blood throbbing in her veins and suddenly she was lightheaded. Was she going to pass out in the Upside Down, with no one around to see or hear her? Was that how Barbara died?

After what seemed to be an eternity, she reached the foyer. The same

messy and disgusting scenario had taken over the whole house. She shook her head in despair and turned around in search of an exit, a sign of life even. But there was nothing there. The door that led to the basement on which Mike and his friends were playing was closed and covered by those vines. Her parents were nowhere to be seen, either. She was alone in there.

"Nancy!".

Everything flickered back to normal and the light abruptly returned, which made the girl squint. The vines and the spores were gone, giving place to the routine sounds of Hawkins. Her overloaded brain and tense muscles made her turn back, startled. A deeply concerned Jonathan Byers stood in the corridor a few feet away from her.

"J-Jonathan...?", she stuttered in a mix of fear and relief.

"You forgot your blouse in the car", he said, showing her the piece of clothing he held on his arm "Is everything okay?"

She wanted to throw herself in his arms and cry out what had just happened, but she couldn't. *Something* made her feel like she should keep it to herself at all costs. She took the blouse.

"Y-yeah. Yes, I'm ok", she replied.

Jonathan frowned and looked at how pallid and stressed out she looked.

"Are you sure?".

"Yeah", Nancy said, running her fingers through her hair "I was just... Not expecting you to be back so soon".

Thankfully, that seemed to be enough to dismiss that matter.

"Yeah, I should be home by now, actually. I better go back before mom gets worried. I, uh... I see you tomorrow", he started back to the car.

Nancy pursed her lips.

"Wait, Jonathan!", she said before she could help it.

He halted on the front door and turned back around.

"Yeah?".

She opened her mouth, but the words never came out. Her thoughts and concerns were confined to her mind, unable to flee through her lips. The girl shook her head and forced herself to smirk.

"Nevermind. It's... Nothing", she spoke.

Jonathan nodded, not seeing any reason to be concerned about it.

"Alright, bye", he said.

"Bye", she smiled at him and gently closed the door.

Much later that day, when Jonathan Byers was long gone and all of Nancy's chores were finished, the sight of her own house swallowed by darkness still haunted her and now going to the fair tomorrow didn't seem so important anymore.

The jeep smoothly lost speed until it stopped next to the sidewalk. The chief turned it off, silencing the engine and grabbed his hat before getting out of the vehicle.

It was a typical sunny day in Hawkins with bright blue sky and a soft cold breeze. Before the Byers' fiasco in 1983, he'd just lay back on his chair at the station and wait for the day to be over so he could go back home, crack open a beer and enjoy the view from his porch on a day like that, but now he had a daughter to look after and a whole town to keep safe, since the Department of Energy wasn't around anymore.

Hopper walked across Jason Allen's garden with large steps and rang the doorbell. A middle-aged man with a nearly bald head and stressed out grey eyes opened the door surprisingly fast.

"Hey, Jason. I heard 'bout what happened. I came as soon as I could", the chief greeted him.

"Thanks for coming, Jim", the man said "I didn't know who else to call".

Jason motioned Hopper to come in. The man wasn't exactly the wealthiest person in Hawkins, which explained why his compact house was in worse shape than Joyce's. There was little furniture, most of which sat around the house for at least two decades. In an ashtray on the armrest of the couch, a recently put-out cigarette still spilled out smoke. The tiny television was off and, just like in Hopper's place before Jane moved in, books and cans were scattered all around.

"Where's your wife and the kids?", Hopper asked, noticing the absence of Jason's family.

"I sent them to my mom's place. I figured they wouldn't be safe here", the man replied.

Under normal circumstances, Hopper would disagree. It was very unlikely that a bear would come back to a house it already invaded before, especially if Jason's dog put up a fight with it, but if the chief's intuition was right, those were *not* normal circumstances. He simply nodded.

"So, did you bury the dog, or...?", he asked.

"No, not yet. I wanted you to take a look at it", Jason replied, gesturing at the backyard.

"Why?", Jim asked, following the man.

Jason stopped walking and looked at the cop.

"Chief, you might not believe me, but I've been hunting for ten years before I moved to Hawkins and I'm sure no bear did that", he said.

Jim's intuition was right.

"Why don't we take a look at it, then?".

Jason pulled off the cloth that covered what remained of a black

hound, scattering hundreds of flies around the garage and the scent of rotten flesh filled the air. The carcass lay on a table underneath a rather old tool shelf.

Jim had seen some nasty things working as a cop, part of them in the past two years, but that didn't make the scene less disgusting. There was a large hole in the creature's abdomen, which revealed the ribcages and what was left of the guts and long and long teeth – Or claw – marks covered the dog's neck. The paws and the face of the animal, however, were left untouched. As gruesome as the sight could look, it was familiar to the cop.

The chief rolled his eyes and sighed in relief. It was a false alarm.

Thank God.

"So, what do you think, chief?", Jason asked.

Hopper finally lit up a cigarette.

"Yup, you're right. That's no bear attack. It was probably just another dog", he said, covering the animal with the cloth again and letting out a soft laugh "You scared me and Flo pretty good with the whole bear thing, though".

"You're telling me a *dog* did this?", the man questioned indignantly.

"Yeah, this stuff always happens. Some street dog probably found its way into your backyard, tried to eat your dog's food and then a fight broke out. The raccoons probably ate this fellow's guts afterwards", Hopper explained, then added, noticing how big were the wounds on the dog's neck "It must have been one hell of a dog, though".

"No, chief. If there was a dog fight, I would've heard...!".

"Yeah, it probably happened in the middle of the night when you were all asleep", Hopper spoke, walking back inside the house "Listen, you should just call your wife and kids and tell them there's nothing to worry about.".

"Are you not going to do anything about it?", Jason asked, following the cop.

"I can't just arrest some street dog", Hopper chuckled "It'll be fine as long as you keep an eye out while you're outside. Those mutts are sneaky little bastards; they sneak into your property and you don't even notice".

"What should I tell the kids?", Jason asked.

Hopper frowned. Kids, his least favorite subject matter. What would he tell Jane if one day she woke up and Eggo was floating motionless on the fishbowl? He would have to think of something soon, since the lifespan of a goldfish was ridiculously short. Well, it was still better than owning a damn dog, he thought.

"I dunno, come up with somethin'", he threw the cigarette away and left.

Once back in the jeep, Hopper waved amicably at Jason before driving away. The gesture was received with a concerned glance from the man.

On his way back to the station, the chief couldn't help but worry. The hoped-for relief of knowing that Jason's incident wasn't anything alarming at all wasn't enough to keep the well-experienced cop from dwelling on his ever-present state of deep concern.

Something about all of that seemed off. Dog fights usually ended up with some nasty scars in the snout rather than the neck and that dog's head was totally clear. It was almost like something *hunted* it, but it was not a bear for sure; the wounds were big, but not *that* big. Hopper cursed, wishing he knew more about hunting or about animals in general.

He shook his head and tried to pull his mind away from the incident. His instincts were probably just tricking him into over-thinking about the situation. So what if something hunted the poor dog down? It was just some fox or whatever. It was something pretty believable; one of the most believable things that happened in the past two years, actually. No suicide, no missing kid, no field full of rotten pumpkins, no nonsense; just some wild creature that killed a dog. Nothing abnormal about that.

Hopper's concern on the case vanished when he looked at Jane's picture attached to the bottom left corner of the windshield. The idea of her spending an afternoon with a teenager boy currently was much more worrying than the remaining of Jason's old dog and the cop questioned himself why did he let her spend the day at the Wheelers' in first place.

Next Chapter preview: Mike boldly asks Eleven to come to the fair with him, but the chief isn't as excited about the invitation as the girl, which might cause another father-daughter confrontation between he and his daughter.

4. Chapter Three - Eight Ten

[A/N] Thanks for the follows and favorites, everyone! I'm glad to see that my readers are enjoying the fanfiction. Anyways, here's today's chapter. Sorry It doesn't have as much action or suspense as most, but it's okay to have some fluff every now and then, right? :P

"You go to school dances with someone that... You know, someone that you like".

"A friend?".

"No, not a friend" – Michael Wheeler and Jane Hopper.

The gentle light blue of the sky had smoothly turned into light yellow, then amber, then crimson and finally black. It was a particularly beautiful night, with billions of stars glowing white upon the town like countless lighthouses shining to each other. Away from the sharp eyes of the birds, crickets now happily hissed on the grass to bring life to the nocturnal silence.

A welcoming yellow light radiated from inside the Wheelers' residence, where the TV had been on for a while now to entertain the group of kids who sat around and ate the snacks Mrs. Wheeler had made them.

Dustin claimed the La-Z Boy for himself after winning a dispute of rock-paper-scissors against Will, who was currently curled up in a blanked on a chair next to the couch. A very sleepy Mike sat on the couch with Jane lying down on it with her head on his lap. Lucas sat on an armchair next to Will's and Max, with nowhere left to sit, simply sat on the armrest of Lucas' chair.

They were watching Star Wars: A New Hope, a classic they all – Except for Jane – had watched several times before. Jane was amazed by it, especially by the concept of The Force, which was something incredibly similar to her powers. The movie was at its very end and

the kids were losing interest on it already. Not too long went by before the credits were rolling in and the Party was getting up from their seats, stretching out to ward off sleep.

"So, did you like the movie, El?", Mike asked.

The girl nodded as she sat up on the couch and rubbed her eye with her fist.

"Of course she does", Dustin yawned and put his hat back on "Everyone loves Star Wars!".

"She should watch the other two. It's gonna blow her mind away!", Lucas realized, judging by the look on Jane's face, that she understood the sentence literally "I mean... I meant you'll be like, totally surprised. It's something good".

"Mike, can we watch it? Please?", she immediately asked, pulling the boy's sleeve.

Mike looked at his watch and blinked twice after realizing what time it was.

"Well, maybe some other day. It's pretty late now", he said.

Dustin quickly got up from his seat, looking a bit worried.

"Wait a minute. How late?", he asked.

Mike looked at his watch again to confirm the time.

"Eight ten", he said.

The other boy sprung from his seat and left the living room.

"Oh, shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit!", he said as he looked at the floor clock on the corridor.

"Can you stop freaking out and just tell us what's wrong?", Max asked and drew another quiet death stare from Jane.

Dustin came back to the living room with both hands on his head and

the most worried of looks on his face.

"I should be home by six; that's what's wrong!", he said "Oh, my mom is gonna *kill* me!".

"Just... Call her and ask if you can stay over", Will advised.

"No, you know my mom better than that, Will", Dustin said, walking across the living room to grab his backpack that hung on the backrest of a chair "Oh, it's going to be a massacre when I get back home!".

"Stop being such a baby! Your mom will probably just yell at you for a couple minutes", Lucas said.

Dustin stopped running to look at his friend.

"You clearly don't understand the seriousness of this situation", he spoke in a wheezy voice "I. Am. Two. Hours. Late!".

Lucas raised an eyebrow.

"So...?".

Dustin snorted and kept walking towards the front door.

"Just come up with an excuse", Max said "Tell your mom that... I don't know, that Mike needed your help with some project for the AV club".

Dustin stopped at the front door and looked back at the girl.

"I can't! She'll eventually find out that I'm lying!", he spoke "Listen, I'll just go home and if you don't hear from me ever again, just know that it was an honor to be friends with you guys".

Dustin turned around and opened the front door to behold the sight of the police chief outstretching his fist to knock on the door. They both seemed a bit shocked for an awkward split second until Hopper finally decided to speak.

"Hey, buddy. I'm here to take Jane home. Is she still awake?"

"Y-yes, sir", Dustin replied.

He kept staring at the chief for a while, unsure of what to do or say.

"You can go now, son", Hopper spoke without looking directly at Dustin.

"Thank you, sir", the boy said and ran past the chief, hastily whispering 'Oh my God, oh my God', under his breath on his way to the garage.

Soon, he'd be paddling home while repeating those exact same words during most of the way.

Jim climbed up the doorsteps and felt the warmth from inside shaking off the cold of late winter. Once the chief was in the house, five curious heads turned towards him from the living room. Hopper involuntarily clenched behind his lips when he saw Jane sitting next to Michael on the couch, holding hands with the boy.

"Time to go, kid. Say goodbye to your friends", he announced.

"Can't she stay over today? I mean, tomorrow is Sunday. She can use the tent on the basement...", Mike started, getting up from the couch.

Yeah, she can stay over at some pre-teen boy's house out of my watch anytime over my dead body.

"Nah, I'm afraid not, buddy. Maybe some other time", Hopper said, gently gripping Jane's shoulder, which she knew that meant it was time for them to leave.

"Alright, hold on. I need to get something before you go" Mike said to Jane and rushed upstairs.

He came back after a minute or so stumbling through the last steps of the stairs and clumsily stopped in front of Jane, handing her a tiny orange piece of paper that the girl did not recognize. Hopper frowned at the instant he looked at it.

You've got to be kidding me.

"It's a ticket to the fair", the boy explained "I... I figured you'd like to go, so I bought it with my allowance".

"Fair?", El asked.

"It's this big amusement park that came to town this week. There's these cool rides there and people selling toys and food...!", Mike said, then noticed the comprehensive look on her face "...Oh, you already know what a fair is"

"Hold on", Hopper interrupted, taking the ticket from Jane's hand "You know the rules, kid. She can't leave without supervision".

"Yeah, that's why Steve's coming with us", Mike said.

Jim chuckled.

"Steve? Isn't he that one kid who graffitied the movies that one time?".

"Well, yeah, but that was two years ago! He's old enough to supervise us now", the boy insisted "He kept us safe from the demodogs last year. He can take care of El".

"Yeah, I don't think Steve will have to worry about monsters in the fair", Hopper said, putting the ticket on his pocket.

"So, can she come?", Mike asked.

"For the last time, kid: *NO!*", Hopper said, trying to focus on the road ahead.

"But you said 'maybe'", Jane replied.

"Yeah, 'maybe' doesn't mean yes", Jim spoke "I'm not letting you by yourself with some kids out there. You know the rules".

"But...".

"No 'buts'", Hopper continued "Those people from the lab; they're still out there and they got an eye on Hawkins. If you go out there and

they find out you're here, they're gonna take you away from me".

"They won't find out!", El said.

"You're being stupid, kid".

"You're stupid!", she snapped.

"Hey!", Hopper shouted "I'm not stupid. I'm trying to keep you safe and you're not making it easy!".

Jane went quiet and helplessly dropped back on her seat, staring at the road through the window. Hopper patted his fingers on the steering wheel, noticing the mistake he was making by yelling at her. The memory of her psychic tantrum last November was still fresh on his mind and he didn't want that to happen again *at all*. Especially not in a moving vehicle.

"Listen kid. I'm not trying to keep you from having fun. I just want to make sure you're safe, that you'll have a normal life without those jerks from the lab getting in the way. It's not going to be like this forever, you know?".

She didn't answer.

"Look, how about we go watch a movie tomorrow, like I promised? I'll let you pick the movie, we can even watch one of those scary ones you love so much", Hopper suggested.

Jane was still static on her seat, watching the landscape slide past the car. Still, Hopper waited for a considerable amount of time for her answer.

"Alright, then. Guess it'll be really boring tomorrow. No movie, no fair, just me reading newspaper all day...", he spoke.

The girl remained silent.

"You're not gonna say anything?", he asked.

She shook her head.

"Alright, then".

They didn't talk for the rest of the trip and Jane didn't look at Hopper's face when she got out of the car and walked into the house. He watched her as she stepped into his room and closed the door a little too roughly behind her.

"Hey, kid, you forgot to feed Egg!" he raised his voice to make himself heard without even looking at the fish.

No response.

"Alright, he's gonna starve, then!", the chief said, sitting on the couch, exhausted "I guess I'll have to be nice to you and feed him this time!".

Still, no response.

Hopper sighed sharply and pulled the ticket out of his pocket. How did Mike afford that? Those things weren't cheap. Well, it certainly was more than most thirteen-year-olds could afford by themselves. Did Mrs. Wheeler even know he had it? Knowing the Wheelers as Hopper did, she probably didn't.

The thought that some boy had taken his time and money to purchase such thing for his daughter without his consent brought a mix of feelings to Hopper. He was mostly angry and frustrated at the boy who clearly intended on dating his little girl, but he also recognized how much he cared about Jane by purchasing by himself a gift he thought she would love. Come to think of it, Mike didn't try to hide it from him. Instead, he asked the psychic girl out right in front of her new father, the police chief. That boy had balls.

Jim couldn't let but grin when this last thought popped in his mind, but the smile did not last long before he looked back at the closed door of his room, on which now El probably lay sideways on the bed with eyes still open, facing the wall and absorbing their conversation.

That got Hopper worried. Jane wasn't the kind of kid who asks something to their parents and does not take a 'no' as an answer. She was quite the opposite, actually. She understood the financial and physical limits of her dad and didn't even bother to ask for something

that she knew Jim wouldn't be able to provide. She never overreacted, either and Hopper couldn't be any more thankful for that, because if she had as many tantrums as most kids of her age, all the nearby cities would feel the ground shaking.

But now she was quiet in her room, convinced that a perfect night with her friend was completely ruined. Knowing Jane as he did, Hopper knew that the fair was a big deal for her. *She needs friends*, the cop caught himself thinking.

Hesitating, Jim got up and stood in front of the room, facing the door knob as he tried to pick the right words.

"Hey, kid. I... I might have an idea for compromise", he said, playing with the ticket between his fingers.

The girl didn't reply. He leaned against the smooth surface of the wooden door.

"How 'bout I let you go to the fair-", he started and the door flew open, making him lose balance and stumble inside.

Jane now sat on the bed with her legs crossed and a very attentive look on her face as she waited for him to finish speaking.

"Now, here's the deal" he resumed very calmly "I'll let you go to the fair, but I'm going with you so you don't do anything stupid. That means no powers, no interacting with strangers and no wandering away from me, understand?"

She nodded a million times as a cheered up grin blossomed on her face. She jumped off the bed and ran towards her dad, wrapping him in a tight hug.

"Thank you", she said.

"Yeah, don't mention it, kid", Hopper said, messing her hair up "Just don't make me regret it, alright?"

She nodded again, shaking her wild curly hair up and down.

"Now go feed your fish before it starves", he ordered "And change

your clothes before going to bed!".

As Jane hopped past him, Jim caught himself wondering about his words and the horrifying truth hit him.

"Holy shit, I'm sounding just like my mom", he muttered.

Next Chapter Preview: Hopper isn't the only paranoid parent at the fair; with Jonathan going out with Nancy, Joyce decides to look after her son at the carnival. Nancy is still silent about her recent episode.

5. Chapter Four - Just a Bit Late

[A/N] Hey, everyone! Just leaving a quick thank you for every single follow, favorite and review and read I've been getting. You guys are amazing!

"This isn't a normal family"

"But it could be. It could be" – Joyce Byers and Robert Newbie.

"Alright, sweetie", said Joyce, carefully inspecting Will's clothes in search of flaws that were soon fixed as she spotted them "Remember: if anything goes wrong, if you have any episodes...".

"Mom, I didn't have an episode in three months", Will spoke, trying to pull back from her when she tried roughly brushing his hair with her fingers.

"I know, I know. But if it happens again...", Joyce continued, resisting to her son's struggle and grooming his hair anyway.

"I should tell you right away", Will completed the sentence that he was very much used to.

"Exactly!", she confirmed.

When Mrs. Byers thought she was done, she stepped back to admire her work and gave Will a tiny grin of approval.

"Look at you; you look so handsome!", she said proudly.

"Mom, can I go now? The guys are waiting for me!", Will spoke.

Joyce looked at her watch.

"Yeah, as soon as Jonathan's home", she said.

Will frowned and glanced at the floor.

"Why does Jonathan have to take me everywhere?", he asked.

"Because, mister, we're trying to prevent anything bad from happening to you again", Joyce responded.

"Yeah, but we're safe now. And this time it's for real". Will said "Besides, Steve is going to be there to look after us".

Joyce pursed her lips at the mention of Steve Harrington. She barely knew the boy, but she hated him. Steve was the teenager who ended up in a fight with Jonathan about a year earlier and got into some trouble with one of his classmates in her house, which ended up in some broken furniture and a shattered plate. She heard rumors that he had purposely spilled his drink on Nancy's clothes after hearing she wanted to break up with him, which was very rude to say the least.

Not to mention the fridge incident. Mrs. Byers was unaware of the monster that Steve and Dustin had put inside her refrigerator until she opened the door on the next day and found herself looking at the frozen corpse of a demodog wrapped up in one of Will's blankets inside.

Steve Harrington wasn't Joyce's favorite person or even the tenth favorite one.

"Well, yeah, but he has four more kids to look after and he might not pay attention if anything happens to you", she said.

"Can't I just ask Mike to walk me home if anything goes wrong?", Will caught himself liking the idea.

"No, sir. You're going with Jonathan", Joyce spoke firmly.

A familiar rustle of gravel outside denounced the arrival of a vehicle, which Joyce concluded to be Jonathan's car. As she walked to encounter her oldest son at the porch, she mechanically reached for a cigarette in her pocket and next thing she knew, it was already lit, firmly balanced between her lips as it slowly spread its smoke in the air.

Her guess was right. Jonathan's Ford LTD was parked on their front

yard, next to the clothesline on which a couple shirts and towels carelessly waved in the wind. Joyce narrowed her eyes in confusion at the sight of the girl on the passenger seat. Jonathan got out of the car and walked inside in a rush, but Joyce's hand caught him by his sleeve before he could make it to the porch.

"Jonathan, what's going on? W-why did you bring Nancy?", she spoke with a bit of concern.

The boy looked at the girl who awaited him in his car and then back at his mother.

"I'm taking her to the fair. I forgot my ticket here", he replied.

Joyce's eyes looked almost dangerous as she stared at the boy. If those dark brown irises could ignite, the whole house would be on fire.

"And aren't you forgetting anything else?", she asked accusingly.

Jonathan frowned, checked his pockets and shook his head in confusion.

"You were supposed to take Will to the fair today!", she remembered.

"No, he's... He's going next week", the boy said without any trace of doubt or guilt on his voice, but his confidence only last for a few seconds "Isn't he?".

Joyce let out a soft, stressed-out laugh and took another sip of her cigarette.

"The boys had been planning this for *months*, Jonathan!", she spoke.

"I-I know, I'm so sorry", he said "I don't know how I forgot... It's fine, I'll just bring him along...".

"No, you'll be with Nancy the whole time and Will is going to want to hang out with the boys...", Joyce made a pause to think "You know what? You go to the fair with Nancy. *I'm* taking Will".

She started walking inside.

"Mom, you don't have to! He'll be fine! The boys will be there!", Jonathan said, in vain as she walked into the house with large steps.

Jonathan stood on the porch for a few seconds before going inside as well and coming back to the car, now with his ticket in hands.

"What was that all about?", Nancy asked, looking at Joyce, who dragged Will to her car by his hand.

"It's... It's nothing. Mom's just being over-protective over Will", Jonathan replied, turning the car on.

"No, not that", the girl said "It seemed that she was mad at you".

Jonathan shook his head, driving carefully through the bumpy dirt road that led out of their home.

"I, uh... I forgot that I was meant to take Will to the fair today. That got mom pretty upset. I don't think I've heard the last of it yet".

"I... I can go home. You can take me some other day...", Nancy said.

"No, no!", said the boy "It's alright. Mom's taking Will and I don't really know if I can talk her out of it".

Nancy looked down at her nails and moved her chin forward, thoughtful.

"How is she holding up?", she softly asked.

"She's... I don't know. Sometimes she's alright, sometimes it feels like she's falling apart", the boy eyed his mother's Ford Pinto through the rearview mirror.

He sighed. Bob's death had been an emotionally crushing event for Joyce and she certainly hadn't recovered from it, yet. She was smoking a lot more lately, enough to bother her sons, even though they didn't complain. Out of all people who had been through the same hell as Jonathan, only Nancy and Joyce had lost someone who they deeply cared about. The two women he loved the most were scarred for life and there was nothing he could do about it.

"I... I just wish I could have met him better. I was so scared that he would be a jerk like dad... But he was there for mom and Will all along. He...", Jonathan's voice began to shake and suddenly he felt Nancy's hand holding his.

"He didn't go in vain. We're all alive because of him", she said, looking into his eyes, even though he was staring at the road.

He simply shook his head.

"You're right", he said, putting an end to the conversation.

They didn't speak much during the rest of the drive.

"I told you it was a stupid idea!", Lucas said impatiently.

Mike, who was walking around the living room carpet, eyeing his watch every few seconds, stopped to look at his friend. Lucas impatiently sat on the couch as he witnessed his friend going crazier at every minute that passed. Because they were all going to meet at Mike's place that afternoon so Steve could pick them up, Mrs. Sinclair had allowed her son to sleep over. Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said about the rest of the Party.

Max, who had skated her way there from her home, sat on the La-Z boy, monotonously leafing through an old and torn-apart X-Men comic that she brought in her backpack.

"It was *not*! She's coming", Mike said with all the confidence he could muster.

"Are you even listening to yourself?", the other boy asked "El is not supposed to go anywhere without Hopper unless it's your home or Will's. There's no way he's letting her come with us".

"Why don't you want Eleven to come?!", Mike snapped.

"I'm just being realistic, man!", Lucas replied, getting up from the couch.

"Can you guys just stop fighting? You sound like five-year-olds", Max

monotonously said "Maybe Hopper is just a bit late".

"Just late", Lucas repeated in disbelief.

Max was the skeptical one of the Party. Whenever a situation looked bad or hard to believe in, she always found a reasonable explanation for it that would make the scenario slightly brighter, which would be an amazing quality if she was in any group of friend except for that one.

"Yup, *just late*. Like when people get stuck in traffic or take too long to dress up...", she spoke.

"Maybe...", Lucas admitted, sitting back on the couch.

"Guys, just relax! We still have time", Max said, which made the boys relax a bit.

Mike didn't go back to his stressed march around the room, but he couldn't help but stare at the watch every now and then and tap his foot on the floor. Lucas, who didn't expect to wait that long for his friends, sat quietly at the couch and impatiently stared the floor.

Suddenly, Max looked up from her comic and then all around the room as if she was trying to spot something out of place.

"Do you guys hear that?", she said, putting the comic book aside.

"What?", Mike asked.

"Shh!".

Mike and Lucas went silent, trying to perceive the noise. There was indeed a stuffy static-like sound coming from somewhere in the distance. The boys identified it before Max did.

Without a word, Mike ran to the basement followed by an equally concerned Lucas and a curious Max. The sound got more and more noticeable as they approached the source: Mike's walkie-talkie that lay in Eleven's fort in a corner. Dustin was yelling at the top of his lungs through it. The sound was muffled due to the weak signal, but still very recognizable.

"Guys, this is urgent! Anyone there?! Mike?! Lucas?! Steve?!", he said.

Mike flew through the basement, knocking over a chair and kneeled in front of the bed of pillows, picking up the radio and pressing the speaker button as soon as he could get a hold of it.

"Hey, Dustin, it's Mike! You're late; we're waiting for you! What's wrong?!", he asked with increasing concern, expecting to hear something worthy of being called a code red.

"Holy. Shit", Dustin started, "Mike, I've been calling you for twenty minutes. Why are you *always* on this channel?"

Mike took a while to notice he hadn't changed his walkie-talkie from channel eleven ever since he last spoke to Jane through it.

"Why didn't you use the phone, like a normal person?", he said, ignoring the previous question.

"Uh, I don't know. Maybe it's because you line has been busy for three hours?!", Dustin said.

Mike assumed that his mother was probably on her room, chatting with one of her friends on the phone again.

"What's wrong, Dustin?", he finally asked, not as concerned anymore.

"Remember last night when you said it wasn't a big deal to come home late?", Dustin said enigmatically.

Mike looked back at Lucas and Max, receiving only a concerned shrug from Lucas.

"Yeah, what about it?".

"It turns out my mom freaked out when I came back!", Dustin informed "Now I'm grounded and I can't go to the fair anymore".

"What?", Mike, Max and Lucas yelled in unison.

"She can't do that!", Lucas said.

"It turns out that she *did*, Lucas", Dustin said, acknowledging the presence of the other two kids along with Mike "We'll have to go some other time".

The three other kids eyed each other for a moment. Mike hesitated before pressing the speaker button again.

"Dustin, you know that we can't", Mike replied.

"What do you mean we can't?", Dustin inquired.

"You know that we've been planning this since September. We were supposed to go today because it's the only day Steve is available to take all of us!", Mike said "Jonathan's taking Will to a concert next Saturday and I have to go to the dentist Sunday".

"Then why can't we go the next week?", Dustin suggested.

"Because I have to go to Erica's stupid school play the next week!", Lucas said, running out of patience "Besides, Steve's dad is going out of town for work that week and Steve is coming with him. That's why we all agreed on going today!".

Dustin went quiet on the other side for a while.

"Alright, we have to go next Friday, then", he spoke.

"No, my mom grounded me for scratching her car on accident. I'm not supposed to leave home on weekdays unless I'm with Billy", Max took the liberty to grab the radio and answer Dustin herself.

The boys cringed when she mentioned her psycho of a brother. They weren't fond of Billy *at all*, especially after the incident last November. If going to the fair on a weekday meant having him around, then they would do anything they could to prevent it from happening.

"Oh, come on! There must be some other day we can go!", Dustin insisted.

Unsure of what to say, Max passed the radio back to Mike, who was about to press the speaker button, when the tuneful ring of the

doorbell echoed through the house.

"W-we have to go!", Mike said, flushed "I'm so sorry, Dustin, but we're all going to the fair".

"Wait, Mike-", Dustin tried to argue before Michael pushed the antenna down, cutting the signal and silencing the device.

Mike stomped upstairs before Lucas and Max even got up from the floor and hastily opened the door, half expecting to see Eleven standing right there next to the chief, but he came across a tall teenager with a complex haircut on which some generous amount of hairspray had been certainly applied.

"Whoa, slow down, kid! The fair isn't going anywhere, alright?", Steve said, taking off his sunglasses and hanging them on the collar of his shirt.

Michael knew that he couldn't look any more disappointed, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"Oh, I thought... Never mind. Did you see the chief on your way here?", he asked.

Steve looked down Maple Street as if that would help him to access his memories quicker.

"Not that I remember of", he said and added, in a worried tone "Why? Did you mess up or something?".

"No! No, it's not that. I was... Forget it", Mike said.

By then, Lucas and Max had already made their way up to the front door to meet the newcomer.

"Where's Dustin?", Steve asked after immediately noticing the absence of his little partner.

"His mom grounded him and he can't go to the fair today", Max said.

Steve frowned

"She can't do that!", he exclaimed.

"Yeah, but she did", she confirmed.

Steve nodded neutrally, though he seemed disappointed with the news.

"Alright, let's go, then", he said, eyeing his watch "Everyone in town must be heading there right now. We should leave before traffic becomes a pain in the...".

"No!", Mike interrupted "We can't leave just yet!".

Steve looked at him with an expression that irradiated confusion.

"Why not?".

"We're waiting for someone else to come", Mike said.

"Are you freaking serious right now?!", Lucas asked "Mike, you have to accept the fact that she isn't coming".

"She *is*!", Mike confirmed.

"How do you know?!", the other boy inquired.

"I just do", Mike replied.

"You 'just do'?", Lucas repeated in disbelief.

"Yeah. I just. Do", the dungeon master spoke in a tone that didn't encourage further arguing, then turned at Steve "Please, just give us ten more minutes".

Steve eyed his watch once again and scratched the side of his head in concern.

"You know what, screw it. I'm getting paid to babysit you little freaks anyway", he mumbled.

"*Babysit?!*", Lucas asked indignantly.

"I thought you were just hanging out with us!", Mike said.

The teenager bit his tongue and gave the boys an apologizing look.

"Don't take it personally. I like hanging out with you guys, but if my mom offered each of you some cash for you to spend some time with me, wouldn't you take it?", he asked.

"How much you're earning by watching us, exactly?", Max asked.

Steve locked his jaw, realizing how deep of a hole he had dug for himself by telling the kids he was getting paid to take them to the fair and he knew how much deeper it would get if numbers got involved. It would be embarrassing to confess how large the amount of money it actually was and even more if he had to confess he tried – And achieved – to raise the price a little bit with each one of their mothers. Their trust was damaged enough already. He didn't want to tear it apart.

"Well, uh, I....".

He barely had time to start the sentence when a large beige vehicle turned around the corner and decreased its speed as it drove closer to the Wheelers' home. The words *Hawkins Police Dept.* were clearly legible in black paint on the door and a blue and red siren adorned the jeep's top.

"You've got to be kidding me", Lucas said.

Mike opened a surprised grin and ran towards the jeep, bumping into Steve on his way towards it.

The doors opened and the chief stepped out, wearing a pair of jeans and a dark brown jacket instead of his police uniform. Though his haircut was fairly decent, his head seemed incomplete without the brown police hat on top of it.

"Sorry we're late, she couldn't decide what to wear", he said, sounding tired.

Jane jumped down from the passenger seat with the happiest of smiles on her face. She had a modest amount of makeup applied to her face and her hair was neatly combed, though not as fancy as it had been in the Snow Ball. She wore a light blue blouse and a pair of

jeans as well.

Hopper and the other kids watched as she ran towards Mike like she was made out of metal and he was a magnet. They wrapped each other in an exaggerated hug and didn't let go for a while. Lucas rolled his eyes at the scene.

"Hey, El", he softly said.

She simply rested her head on his shoulder.

Steve vaguely gestured at the girl and looked around interrogatively, hoping that anyone would notice his confusion.

"Wait, what?", he asked "Who the hell is this girl?"

"That's El. You know, the girl saved us from those demodogs a few months ago?", Lucas explained.

Steve took a better look at the girl. Was that the kid who showed up at the Byers' dressed up like a punk?

"Well, yeah, but where the hell did she come from?", he asked, wary of the seemingly innocent kid who reluctantly stepped away from her hug with Mike.

They all looked at the boy. He had been through the same hell as them. He had fought monsters, seen other dimensions and acknowledged the existence of a huge government conspiracy. Still, he had only a slight idea of what actually happened. For example, he didn't know the first thing about Eleven and no one had taken their time to explain anything to him.

"Well, you see, she's...", Lucas started.

"It's a long story, son", Hopper said, walking past Steve and standing in front of Mike, who stared at the cop with distrust "Listen, kid. I'm letting her come under a few conditions".

The challenging look on Mike's eyes turned into an interrogative expression.

"She'll be under my watch the whole time. Anywhere she goes, she'll need my permission. She can't use her powers *at all* and you kids can't wander away from me", Hopper continued "These are the rules".

"But Steve will be watching us the whole time", Mike argued.

Hopper looked at the teenager who chatted with Lucas in a low voice, not daring to drive his eyes away from Jane.

"Well, I guess your moms will feel much safer if I'm there too", he spoke, coming back into the jeep.

Mike opened his mouth to say something, but the chief was already closing the driver's door and getting ready to start the engine.

"Can El at least come with us?", the boy asked.

Steve widened his eyes.

"Uh, I dunno", the chief said, trying to come up with an excuse that was not *I won't leave my daughter in a car full of teenagers even if my life depends on it* "I mean, Steve already has the three of you guys to look after...".

"We won't cause any trouble", Mike said "I promise".

That damned word.

Hopper scratched his ear.

"Look, kid, I, uh...".

"Please?", Jane asked, leaning on the passenger window.

Hopper started the engine.

"What the hell", he mumbled "Alright, kid. You can go with them, but behave, for God's sake".

By the time he was driving ahead of Steve's red BMW on his way to the fair, the chief couldn't help but glance at the rearview mirror every now and then and wonder if that whole thing had been a

mistake. Not knowing what was happening in Steve's car was driving the chief insane. He sighed. The things he wouldn't do for a cigarette at that moment...

Next Chapter Preview: The case of Jason Allen's dog draws some undesired attention. A strange teenager shows up at Mr. Wheeler's door. A potentially deadly creature finds its way to Dustin's house and the boy finds out something unexpected about it.

6. Chapter Five - The Musketeer

[A/N] Hey, it's been a while, but chapter five is finally done! Thanks again for the follows, reviews and favorites! I'm glad you're enjoying my story. I wanted to mention that a friend recently pointed out that there are some occasional typos in my stories and it's hard to fix that since english is not my first language, so please ignore the typos if you find those in the story.

I'll be posting next chapter really soon, hopefully.

"D'artagnan... I'm gonna call you D'artagnan" – Dustin Henderson.

Jason Allen was having an unusual week, to say the least.

First, his dog was killed in the middle of the night with no apparent reason, even though he rarely saw any kind of animals around his house, much less an animal that could have done such damage to a dog.

Weirdly enough, Jim Hopper himself had decided to investigate the incident and showed more concern and interest on it than Jason himself, only to take the conclusion that it wasn't anything worrying at all and walk away with what seemed to be an overwhelming relief, like he had taken a huge weight out of his back by simply checking the dog.

Now these men in well groomed suits with portable radios on their belts who introduced themselves as agents of environmental protection were knocking on his front door and saying he had to get rid of the dog's body.

"You what?", he asked, confused.

The men eyed each other. One was a bald elderly man and the other, though much younger than the first one, had a neatly combed grey hair and a beard of the same color that denounced that he left his

youth a long time ago.

"We received an anonym call from the neighbors saying that you were burying a wounded animal in your property", said the older one with a tone of concern.

"Yeah, but it's dead", Jason said in confusion "I-I don't see what's wrong...".

"The fact that it was wounded could mean the cuts could have fungal or bacterial infections. Either of those could contaminate the soil and the nearby ecosystem", the younger one explained "That's why we need to give the body a proper destination".

Jason seemed confused. He didn't understand much of what those men said, but it sounded like something very serious.

"What exactly do you mean by that?", he asked.

"We intend on incinerating the body", the man with grey hair responded, then added "With your consent, of course. Otherwise, we have other ways of discarding it".

"Look, I can't pay for...".

"It will not cost anything, sir. We're not a private corporation; all expenses are paid by the government", the older one said "In fact, not allowing us to keep the body from contaminating the area would be illegal".

Jason widened his eyes and both men knew that they had his attention.

"Listen, sir, I know it's a bit of an inconvenience, but we don't have much of a choice, either. We're just trying to do our job", the younger one added "If you could let us get rid of the body, you'll be making things easier to all of us".

Jason sighed.

"Alright", he said, gesturing for them to walk in "It's on the backyard".

To the eyes of the workers of Montauk National Laboratory, the fact that most civilians were ignorant always helped them to put their hands on useful information without raising any suspicions. Jason Allen, for example, had no way to find out that burying his dog, wounded or not, wouldn't make any harm to the environment, much less to know the actual reason why those two men were taking the body away.

As they got in the white van on which the words 'Environmental Protection' were clearly legible in black letters on the side and carried a large metal container inside of which the deceased animal was, he didn't make any questions. Jason simply let those men take the dog away without any doubts that the right thing was being made.

Thanks to that, they and a few other researchers were free to examine the decaying body with no interruption or restriction many miles away, in the very edge of the town, on the decaying building that once was the Department of Energy.

A few white tents were spread around the yard behind the lab that had once been a field testing area, though they produced and tested only a few equipments in the yard. That wasn't the main purpose of the lab, it had never been. A handful of governmental vehicles such as black fords and white vans were parked around the camp on which a few scientists walked back and forth to run tests and analyze substances.

The main tent, slightly larger than the others, which held computers and most technological equipments in the camp, was the one on which the two agents that had acquired the dog and a few other scientists carefully examined the body.

"Any conclusions yet?", asked a woman on her late thirties, looking up from the notes she wrote down in a clipboard to the table set in the interior of the tent, on which the animal was lying lifeless.

"The injuries are abnormally large and the killing pattern is unusual", the elder man who had convinced Jason Allen to hand the dog over said, pointing at the wounds with the pen he held "Most carnivores use their teeth to cut the prey's neck and then usually feed on the

abdomen, where the flesh is more accessible. This creature seems to have used its claws to tear a hole in the abdomen and then it bit the neck".

The female scientist cringed at the sight and smell of the carcass.

"Anything from the samples?", she asked to the grey-haired researcher, who sat at a small metal desk in a corner, examining bits of skin and bones and exposing test tubes to flames.

He turned around on his chair, nodding.

"All of the samples react abnormally to the heat", he stated.

"How so?", asked a much older man who hadn't said a word until then.

Covered in shadows, he was standing near the entrance of the tent, looking at the dog with a mysterious interest in his left blue eye. The right one was pallid and semi closed, with a deep scar drawn from his eyebrow to his mouth. Despite being seemingly intact, the eye had been permanently blinded.

The grey-haired scientist who analyzed the samples carefully selected a small chunk of flesh from a flask and picked it up with a pair of forceps. Once the man had a proper hold of it, he lit a small blowtorch on, letting a strong and static open flame blossom from the end of the pipe and simply set fire to the flesh.

It started to squirm as if disturbed by the flames, turning black much faster than a regular chunk of meat would. Finally, a small spiral of black spores rose up from the sample like living ashes, gaining distance from the heat. The scientist extinguished the flame.

The ancient man stepped closer to the researcher and examined the pile of dead black specs that floated down lifelessly from the ceiling of the van. In a black and flawless suit and imposing posture, it wouldn't take much imagination for one to compare him to the grim reaper. There was little white hair left on the top of his head, but it was still impeccably combed. He leaned against the table, examining what remained of the gloomy show they all had just witnessed,

allowing a devilish grin to appear on his mutilated face.

"Extraordinary", Dr. Martin Brenner said.

"Mike! Mike, do you copy?!", Dustin yelled to the radio "Son of a bitch!".

The boy looked at the ceiling and closed his eyes hopelessly.

"Stupid fair, stupid bedtime, piece of shit", he muttered, walking around the living room.

He was thankful that his parents were at work then. He could only imagine what they would do if they found their son loudly cussing in the house. He pressed the speaker button.

"Hello, Mike? This isn't a joke, alright? We need to go to the fair together! It's the rule of the Party!", he said and waited for an answer, in vain "You gotta be kidding me!".

He threw the radio across the room and it luckily landed on the couch.

"Yeah, you can go to your stupid walk in the fair with your dates. I bet that you're all kissing each other by now, you and your new girlfriends", Dustin sat back on an armchair, defeated "This is what I get for being loyal to you guys. Guess what, next time Lucas messes up in D&D, I'm not saving his ass".

Dustin usually had a fertile mind that could find creative solutions for most problems, but right then, his options were limited to either sit around and feel bad or sit around and feel bad while eating. The second option was more appealing.

Still mumbling countless curses under his breath, Dustin got up and went to the kitchen to search inside drawers and cabinets for anything edible. His mood got a lot better when he found a half-full bowl of three musketeers sitting on the corner of a rather high shelf on a drawer. That was the candy that not only him, but all of his friends had earned on Halloween. Dustin seemed to be the only member of the Party to enjoy the thing, so all of his friends had gave

him the handfuls of nougat they had instead of throwing it away. The boy was planning on saving the candy for an especial occasion, but he ended up forgetting about it until that moment. Luckily, the candy was still one month away from expiring.

"Yes!", he laughed a bit "I knew these would be worth keeping at some point".

He grabbed the bowl and took it to the living room, where he turned on the TV and started devouring the candy. He didn't intend on eating the whole thing, but he wouldn't be surprised if it somehow happened.

Not long passed before Tews, Mrs. Henderson's new cat, started to hiss. The little black and white kitten sat in front of the backdoor and seemed uneasy about something outside. At first, Dustin thought it was just trying to spit out a hair ball, but the hisses got louder and sounded a lot more threatening. At last, the cat started to scratch the glass and meow loudly.

"What the hell do you want?", Dustin yelled, out of patience.

Tews only hissed louder as a response. Dustin got up from the armchair and opened the glass door so the cat could get out, but it didn't. Instead, it stepped back in fear and hissed at the backyard.

Dustin followed his cat's eyes to see a slight movement on a bush at the edge of the woods. The boy squinted to try to see if it was just some small animal messing around, like a raccoon or a deer or if it was something more troublesome, like a street dog or maybe a bear. The bushes stopped shaking and a loud screech came from them, which caused Tews to run into the kitchen and Dustin to cover his ears.

It seemed like an eternity had passed since the last time he had heard that sound. The boy could never forget the noise that still haunted his dreams. It did not feel natural. It felt like something from another world, a sound that shouldn't exist. That was the bone-chilling sound of pure evil at its last moments, the scream of a trapped beast trying to escape.

It was the roar of a demogorgon.

The bushes shook again.

"Shit!", Dustin slammed the door shut so fast that he was afraid the glass would break.

He picked up his radio before rushing to his room, cursing through the whole way. Once in his room, the boy locked the door behind him with his heart beating almost as frenetically as his hands shook.

"Mike! I need you to answer! It's a code red; I'm *not* kidding!", he yelled "Mike! Lucas! Max! Steve! Erica! Anyone! It's a code red! There is a demogorgon in my house!"

No response.

"You have to be kidding me", Dustin let go of the radio and eyed the door, having second thoughts on leaving his room "Alright, alright. There's a demogorgon in my backyard. What would Steve do? Well, he'd kick his ass with a baseball bat, but I can't just punch a demogorgon down...".

His thoughts were interrupted by the sight of his old hockey-stick leaning against a wall in a corner.

"...Or can I?".

The backdoor slid open and a terrified Dustin sneaked out. He'd feel a lot better if he had his hockey outfit on as well, but the truth was that he had no idea of where it was, so he had nothing besides his clothes to offer him any protection and he was sure that a pair of sweatpants and a "Jaws" shirt wouldn't do much to keep a demogorgon from biting his face off.

Perfect.

Dustin closed the door behind him and swung the hockey-stick around like a matador luring a bull closer.

The roar had ceased and so had the movement in the woods, but a

few primal growls still came from the forest, though not as close as before.

"Come here, you son of a bitch! I know you're there", Dustin whistled a couple times "Come on, I know that Steve and Eleven kicked your butt and I know I can do the same!".

As much as his plan seemed suicidal, it wasn't completely irrational. Dustin knew how much D'artagnan the demodog hated to be exposed to the light; it hurt its skin and caused it to flinch every time he was in contact with it. It was a warm day outside and the boy was standing under the sunlight. With some luck, he'd catch the demogorgon off guard and hopefully land a few hits on the confused creature before it could react.

"Hey, I'm over here! Remember me? I'm friends with the girl who sent you back to the Upside Down. I bet that hurt, didn't it?", he teased.

A slightly louder growl came from somewhere in the woods and it startled the boy.

"Hey, dickhead! I'm right here!", the boy said "Come here and I'll knock your head off, you hear me?"

The growls grew louder and closer. It was walking towards Dustin.

"Alright, let's do this", Dustin mumbled to himself, holding his improvised weapon very tightly.

With all the confidence left in his body, he let out an energetic yell, ran towards the monster out of sight and he regretted it immediately after seeing the size of the creature that came out of the bushes. It was *not* a demogorgon.

A large quadruped animal trotted through the forest floor and leaped from the bushes, landing heavily on the edge of the woods. It stood on the borderline of the shadows. The animal opened its mouth, spreading its five lips apart and let out another deafening screech at Dustin. Some of its teeth still had blood on them. Its black skin was moist and rough like an amphibian's.

"Shit!", Dustin screamed, falling on his back and dropping his hockey-stick.

Hopeless and terrified, he started kicking his legs forward to push himself away from the huge demodog. The creature still roared at him, spitting saliva all over the boy's clothes.

At last, the screech ended and the animal kept its head pointing towards Dustin as if it could somehow see him. Dustin still sat on the floor only a couple feet away when the demodog made something that turned his skin as white as paper.

It stepped out of the shadows.

Like a jaguar, it slowly approached Dustin, dragging its paws forward and breathing heavily. The warmth and the light didn't seem to bother it at all. The boy could have ran, or screamed, or done anything to fight the creature. Instead, he stood still in shock, eyes wide and heart racing. Afraid and powerless like a bird facing a snake. The creature lowered its body as if it was preparing to pounce and kept looking at the boy.

But instead of pouncing, it sprung its front legs up in a cheerful jump and let out little content growls, waving its petal-shaped lips around. The creature was now bouncing up and down like a happy dog as it acknowledged Dustin's presence. When it lowered its head and front legs to jump again, the boy recognized a familiar spot on the creatures back.

"Holy shit", Dustin's voice shook as he slowly got up from the floor "Dart?".

D'artagnan growled cheerfully and jumped in the air once again at the mention of its name. Dustin couldn't help but laugh.

"How are you even alive buddy?", he asked, stretching his hand to pet the creature "Jesus, you're big. You're like three feet tall..."

Dart stepped away from Dustin's hand and hissed at the boy. Dustin jumped back.

"Shit, alright, alright. You don't like being pet...", he said "Are you

hungry? Wait right here".

Dustin turned around to go back in the house and the demodog followed him.

"Wait, no! I said wait! Wait right here. I'll be right back, understand?", he asked.

Dart growled and stepped closer.

"Son of a bitch. Alright, screw it. Sorry buddy, but I can't let you in", Dustin said, walking in and closing the door before the animal could enter the house.

He quickly ran to the living room and grabbed the bowl of three musketeers. He had no idea why, but Dart loved it as much as he did. Dustin found some trouble in opening the backdoor again, since Dart was leaning against it to try to get in. Once outside, the boy got a candy out of the bowl, opened the wrapping and threw it to the demodog. Dart caught the treat in the air and grunted gratefully at his master.

Dustin sighed.

"What the hell am I supposed to do with you now?", he asked to no one in particular.

The boy looked at the outdoor basement entrance a few feet away. Dart had escaped the place once before, but he didn't have any options available.

"Alright, follow me, buddy", he said "I need to keep you somewhere".

Dart didn't need another command to walk behind Dustin for a couple feet, but he halted when they reached the entrance to the basement. The boy turned around to see a monster as tall as Mike's little sister looking down – Though he didn't have eyes – in fear at the basement, like a kitten that's too scared to jump in the water.

"Come on, Dart. I won't lock you in here alone this time, I promise", the boy said "I need to hide you somewhere".

Dart hesitated, analyzing the steps down the dark room. Dustin pulled another three musketeers from the bowl and stretched showed it to the demodog.

"Here, you can have this one if you come down", he spoke.

Reluctantly, the animal walked down, carefully crawling down the steps towards the treat that was being offered to him. He grabbed the candy from Dustin's hand and happily chewed it.

"Alright, you want another one?", Dustin asked, showing yet another candy to the creature.

Dart growled in anticipation and stared interestedly at the bar of chocolate.

"Okay, fetch!", the boy said, throwing it as far as he could.

As the demodog jumped past him and ran through the basement, Dustin put the candy bowl on an old shelf and ran upstairs, only stopping once he had reached the door. He couldn't see much further in the dark room, but judging by the noises inside of it, Dart was still devouring his snack in a corner.

"Alright, hold on! I'll be right back. Don't you move!", he yelled and exited the basement.

Never before in his life Dustin had ran so fast into his house. In a blink of eyes, he was already in his room, grabbing his flashlight on his bed and leaving the hockey-stick inside the closet.

He was about to leave when an idea popped in his mind. The boy turned around and immediately opened all the drawers, searching among piles of books, some of which he was yet to return to the library. After what seemed to be an unnecessarily long amount of time, Dustin found what he was looking for: an old blue book that displayed the image of a happy Labrador on its cover.

The book was titled 'dog training for beginners'. It used to be Will's back when the Byers' dog, Chester, was just a puppy, but it never actually learned an actually useful trick, so the book was given to Dustin since he was supposed to get a dog a few years back, but his

mother ended up falling in love with an orange kitten at the pet shop and bought it instead. Thus, the book was left forgotten in his bedroom and Dustin would not have ever remembered it if the insane idea of training D'artagnan hadn't crossed his mind.

Just as fast as he got to his room, the boy ran back outside with his flashlight and carefully entered the basement to find an impatient Dart sitting at the bottom of the stairs. The nougat bowl was knocked over, but the candy was still intact. Judging by the bar of chocolate covered in saliva on the floor, the demodog had actually tried to eat it on Dustin's absence, but found out that it didn't taste as good with the wrapping.

"Alright", Dustin said, closing the basement door and turning both the little light bulb that barely illuminated the place and his flashlight on "If you wanna stay here at least for today, you'll have to learn how to behave, alright?", he showed the book at the creature.

Dart simply leaned its neck to the side.

"So, if you want more nougat, you'll have to earn it, buddy", said Dustin, opening the book and skipping through a few pages of introduction until he found an article about training "Okay, here it is: how to teach a dog to sit down. 'Offer a treat to the dog, placing it right above its head and say the word *sit*. The dog will sit down to get a clearer view of the treat...' You don't have... Alright, screw it. 'Repeat the process and soon it will start to associate the gesture and the command to sit with a reward'. Sounds pretty simple, huh?".

Dart growled as if agreeing. Dusting closed the book and placed it on the bookshelf.

"Alright, let's do this", he said, grabbing a chocolate bar and showing it to Dart "D'artagnan, *sit*".

The demodog simply waited for Dustin to let go of the candy. The boy stepped closer.

"D'artagnan, *sit*!", he commanded again.

Dart jumped towards Dustin and roared loudly in response, causing

him to drop both the candy and the flashlight in fear.

"Shit!", he yelled, desperately reaching for the flashlight on the poorly illuminated floor.

Once he grabbed the object, he pointed it at Dart, only to see him peacefully eating the candy he made his master drop.

"Oh, boy. This is going to be a long day", Dustin muttered.

Indeed it was.

Ted Wheeler seemed not to care about the doorbell ringing multiple times as he tediously read the newspaper on the couch, which all of his neighbors knew, was his usual response to sudden visitors in the middle of the day. He only looked up at the front door when the sound repeated itself.

"Honey, can you please answer the door?", he asked.

Karen was upstairs. Ted was right across the room.

"I can't, I'm giving Holly a bath!", she replied.

Groaning, Mr. Wheeler took his time to put down the newspaper and get up from the couch to answer the door. Ted monotonously opened it to see a dark skinned teenager with an unusual purple haircut partially hidden by a hood and black leather clothes.

"Can I help you?", he asked without fully opening the door.

"Um, yeah. I'm looking for my friend Jane. She said she lives with the chief, but no one answered at his place. I went to the police station and they told me that she might be here", the girl said.

"Karen, was Jane Hopper here today with Michael?", Ted asked, turning his head at the second floor.

"No, Hopper came here to take her home last night!", Mrs. Wheeler informed.

"No, she left last night", Ted repeated to the weirdly dressed girl.

She pursed her lips.

"Do you know where she might be?", she asked.

"Look, you ain't gonna find any of my son's friends in here. They're all probably at the fair right now", Ted replied.

A glimpse of hope crossed her eyes.

"Would you mind pointing where the fair is? I just arrived in town".

Next Chapter Preview: The party enjoys their day at the fair, but the tension between Max and Jane eventually bursts into a fight. Joyce and Hopper seem to be developing a new bond and Mike has something to tell Jane.

7. Chapter Six - The Fair

[A/N] (Panting) Alright, school has been a piece of work these last two months and I barely had time to write, but here it is, everyone: Chapter six! :D

I'd like to thank every one of my readers for sticking to this story. I would've stopped writing it a long time ago if it wasn't for you guys.

"Did you keep secrets from El?" – Maxine Mayfield

Jane's eyes widened and her heart started racing at the sight of the entrance gate that proudly displayed the words 'Food', 'Rides', and 'Fun' in bright colorful lights. The place itself irradiated colors and light in a way that Jane had never seen before.

At every step they took, she discovered something new and interesting right around the corner. Cotton-shaped sweets being sold like ice cream, tents in which kids played games she had never seen before, a round, metallic structure with many animal-shaped seats attached to it. According to Mike, this last one was called a carousel, a ride on which kids would sit on horses – El had never heard of that animal – and just slowly spin around for a couple minutes. The Party wasn't too excited about trying it and neither was Jane. It seemed rather boring for her when compared to the other wonders of the park.

Joyce, Hopper and Steve walked among them like guard dogs, watching the kids as they wandered through the fairly crowded sidewalk. Occasionally, Steve would drag his attention away to glance at a group of girls when he thought they weren't looking, but he would quickly snap back to the present and carried on with his guarding mission.

And so the hours cheerfully went on as the kids roamed through the fair, boarding in thrilling rides and playing games at the tents. Soon Jane found out that each tent had a different game that would

reward them with different prizes. She'd be excited about her discovery, if Max wasn't so good at all of them, unlike El. The clouds of an upcoming rain in the horizon covered the last red light beams of the day and the electric lights of the fair were turned on by the time she had beaten almost all of the games.

"Boo ya!", Max yelled as she watched the pile of cans collapsing with the impact of the tennis ball she had just thrown.

"That was sick!", Will complimented.

"How the hell do you do this?!", Lucas asked.

Max smiled.

"It's called *skill*, Stalker", she said, then turned to at the clerk, an arguably old man who eyed the kids indifferently "What can I get from that?".

"It's up to you", he said, gesturing to the lined up shelves on the back of the tent.

The shelves contained several kinds of rewards and treats, from stuffed animals to rubber and plastic toys. Most of them didn't interest the girl since they were meant for kids who were way younger than them, so a blue cap that said 'Hawkins' Country Fair' hanging in the corner of one of the shelves seemed to be the only reasonable choice.

"The cap. That blue one", she picked.

"You sure?", the clerk asked "You could take way better stuff with your score".

"Yeah, I'm sure".

The old man shrugged, grabbed the hat and handed it to the girl, who put it on like a mighty trophy.

"How do I look?", she asked.

"You look dumb", Mike laughed.

"She looks nice...", Lucas absently said "I-I mean, with the cap!"

Max raised an eyebrow.

"Why? Do I not look nice without it?", she asked.

"No! I, I mean, yeah, you do, but...", he stuttered.

The girl chuckled.

"You're so funny when you don't know what to say", she spoke.

"Mike...?", Jane asked, holding Mike's arm.

"Yeah?", he said, immediately pulling his attention away from Max and Lucas.

"I want that", she said, pointing at a tiger plush on the shelf in a nothing discrete way.

"Uh...", the boy tried to come up with an elaborate excuse to avoid trying to earn the toy, since he would probably fail on his attempt "I would, but...".

"Ooh, I'd like to see you try!", Max said, glancing at Mike and pretending that El wasn't staring at her *again* "Come on, Wheeler, we haven't tested your skills the whole night".

"Look, guys, I just can't, I...", Mike said.

"She's right, you should try it", Lucas spoke.

"Shut up, Lucas! You know I suck at this game!", the other boy said "Besides, I'm almost out of money".

He saw the hope fading from Jane's eyes when he glanced at her and felt her grip on his arm getting a little tighter.

"Please?", she asked.

That little soft voice got him every time. El sounded so pure, so delicate whenever she spoke to him. He could imagine that familiar comforting warmth coming from her eyes when he heard that single

word coming from her. God, did she even knew what she was doing to him? He gulped.

"Fine", he said to Lucas and Max.

When he turned to the tent, the stacked cans seemed to be ridiculously far away, almost too far for a ball to reach. He grabbed a couple coins from his pocket and put them in the table in front of the clerk.

"I want three tries", he said, trying to transmit the confidence he didn't feel.

Three tennis balls were put in the table in change for the boy's money and the cans that Max had knocked down were rearranged for him. The boy wiped the sweat from his hands on his pants and grabbed the first ball.

It was a lame throw.

Mike put all of his strength in the throw, but it wasn't precise *at all*. The ball flew past the cans and hit one of the pillars that kept the tent up, almost comically bouncing away from it. He heard a pitiful unison of comprehensive groans coming from his friends and felt his ears flushing red. He couldn't fail; not in front of El. He threw the second ball.

The thing barely made it to the table that supported the cans. The ball bounced off of it and pathetically fell to the floor.

Will and Lucas were now saying words of encouragement, but Mike didn't pay attention to it. He was too focused on getting the third throw right. What would El think if he couldn't even do that for her? How would she feel if he failed her?

I can't let El down, I can't let her down. She'll think I'm a loser.

He threw the third ball.

It slipped out of his fingers before he meant to release it, spinning backwards and hitting the floor right in front of the small table that supported the cans. Mike stood still, staring at the static object on the

floor and then turned back at his friends. El looked deeply disappointed and Will seemed to share his defeat, but Lucas and Max didn't seem so pitiful.

"Oh, that was sad, Mike!", Max said.

"Dude, you did that on purpose, right?", Lucas asked.

"Shut up!", Mike demanded "I did my best, alright?".

"Then you're just awful", Max joked.

"Mouth-breather".

The silence dropped like a rock upon them. Will, Lucas and Mike shrugged uncomfortably as Max and El pierced each other with their eyes. Will glanced at Steve, Hopper and his mom. They were fairly close to them, but he couldn't tell if they were able to stop El in time if she lost her patience.

"What the hell did you just call me?", Max stepped closer.

"I *hate* you!", Jane yelled.

"El, what are you talking about?", Mike asked.

"Excuse me?!", Max inquired, completely ignoring Mike "What have I done wrong? Last time I checked, *you* were the asshole ignoring me all the time and pretending like I didn't exist or something!".

"Alright, that's enough!", Lucas tried to stop them before they got into a fight, which basically meant broken bones and people being thrown in the air, when the opponent was Eleven.

Max held his wrist before he touched her.

"No, it's not enough! I'm trying to get along with you guys, I'm really trying. I tried to stick with you even when Dustin and Mike treated me like trash, but now this girl, who you always say is *so awesome*, keeps just acting like she wants me to jump off a cliff", she said, sounding like she was about to cry.

"That's not true!", Mike said.

"Yes, it is! What, are we gonna pretend that we don't notice that she always sits away from me whenever we're hanging out, or that she wasn't giving me those creepy looks during the entire D&D game, or that she simply walked past me when we first met? You know what, El? You can be a freak all you want, because I'm out!", Max yelled, losing the battle against the tears.

Freak?

El lowered her head, focusing on Max's legs. She had done it before with countless necks and an arm. She could already imagine the bone snapping...

"Hey!", Hopper grabbed Jane by her arm "What the hell do you think you're doing? What were the rules?".

Jane glanced at Max, who had now turned around and was walking away, followed by an apologizing Lucas, with Steve sprinting towards them.

El looked back at her dad. How could he tell that she was going to use her powers? Did he know her *that* well?

"She called me a freak", she said.

"Yeah, that's no reason to lose control. Kids say mean stuff all the time and you'll have to learn how to deal with that", Hopper said "Now, you behave here or I can take us both home right away".

She had thrown countless objects at Jim before. A dictionary, a waffle plate, a couch, glass shards... He didn't seem worthy of her respect back when they lived in the dirty old cabin, but now he was frightening and imposing to the point that all that Jane could do in response was to nod in fear. He simply nodded back and left back to where Joyce was.

"El, why did you say that?", Mike asked when Hopper was already far away.

"That was messed up", Will agreed.

"She said you' are awful", Jane said "She was mean".

Mike shrugged.

"Well, yeah, but... That wasn't a big deal. She was just joking", the boy said.

El looked back to where Max had left, but there was no sign of her or Lucas anywhere.

"Did you mean that? That you hate her?", Mike asked.

El didn't say anything. Her anger was now fading out and she was starting to feel the weight of her actions.

"She does act weird around Max...", Will said.

"But why? What's wrong about her?", Mike asked.

Jane looked up, but didn't say anything. Truth to be said, she never truly understood the reason why she despised Max so much.

"El, she... She wanted to be your friend as well. She helped us save your life last year", he boy continued.

Jane gave him an interrogative look.

"She liked you, El. We told her about that time you saved Will and when you flipped the van. She got really excited when she got to meet you", Mike continued speaking.

He wasn't confronting Jane. Mike would never dream of doing such thing. He was simply pointing out that Max wasn't a monster, which made El feel even worse, but not necessarily sorry.

"El, can you promise me something?", Mike asked.

El looked at him, fearing the worst with tears starting to blossom from her big eyes of hazel.

"Can you please promise me that you'll apologize to Max and try to get along with her?", he asked "I promise that if you do that, she

won't be mean ever again".

El blinked twice. Maybe Max wasn't that important for Mike, after all. When Jane hurt Lucas over one year earlier, Mike started yelling, asking what was wrong with her. That memory still tightened her chest whenever she thought of it. But now, she and Max had a fight and Mike seemed to be on her side. But, as she concluded when she first met her, Max was still somewhat important for them.

"Promise", she said.

"I swear to God, Joyce. It gets harder every minute", he said, taking a sip of coffee as he sat back on his spot on the bench next to Joyce.

The beverage was too sweet and almost cold, but what could he ask for in a small town's local fair? He continued to speak when he saw the interrogative glare she gave him.

"Being a dad", he said, eyeing Jane, Will and Michael as they spoke to each other about the recent incident "I don't remember it being this damn hard".

Joyce laughed a bit.

"Well, nobody told us it was going to be easy...", she said, picking up a cigarette from her pocket and failing at all of her attempts to light it up "Damn it... Hop, can I borrow your lighter?".

He moved uncomfortably on the bench.

"Uh, I... I don't have it with me. Jane made me promise I'd quit smoking", he said.

Joyce rolled her eyes.

"Oh... Jonathan tried to make me quit a couple times, too, but...", she rolled her eyes and left the sentence die in mid-air.

Once again, she slipped her finger down, expecting to see nothing but pallid sparks, but this time a steady little flame blossomed from the tip of the lighter. She dipped her cigarette in it and took a long drag.

She got another one and handed it to Hopper.

"Just in case... Do you want one?", she asked.

"Hell yeah!", he laughed "I haven't had one all day".

Joyce quickly lit up another cigarette and gave it to Hopper. He didn't like 'Camels' very much, but it would have to do for now.

"Why do you think they were fighting?", Joyce asked after exhaling smoke.

Hopper sighed.

"I don't know, it looks like that girl Max called Jane a freak or something", he said "I don't really think that these two can get along".

Joyce stood in a thoughtful silence.

"So, how are things going with Jane, anyway?", she tried to change the subject.

"Well, it's not *perfect*, but... She is a nice kid, always wanting to learn new stuff. I think she might just make it to college", he replied.

Joyce felt a motherly cheer by hearing that. El had always been like a daughter to her and it seemed that she reciprocated the feeling. Knowing that the girl would have a bright future was comforting to her.

"Bob would have loved her, you know. He always had that thing for kids, he...".

She went suddenly quiet, staring into the distance. She looked at Hopper in surprise when she felt his hand firmly holding hers.

"Hey", he said "I know that feeling. It's alright to feel that way. It only shows that you're human".

Joyce took another drag of her cigarette, stressfully shaking her leg up and down.

"I miss him so much, Hop...", she said.

"Yeah, I know", his voice was comprehensively low "I know".

Both went quiet. Hopper's heart seemed to weight a ton. He couldn't ever fix that wound in her heart even if he tried. Seeing grief consuming Joyce was painful to him, almost physically painful.

He envied Bob so much in the past year. The kind former nerd had earned Joyce's heart, something that Jim himself had always been afraid of doing himself. But as much as he wished it could be different, he still respected Bob. In the end of the day, he made Joyce happy and Jim had other things to worry about, back then.

Now neither Bob nor Hopper could make her happy again.

"Dad".

Joyce and Hopper let go of each other's hand like teenagers who got caught making out. The cop hastily threw his cigarette away.

Jane, Will and Mike walked towards them.

"Fer-ris wheel", she struggled to properly pronounce the word.

Hopper looked at the silvery ride rising in the distance.

"You wanna go to the Ferris wheel, kid?", he asked.

She nodded.

"Mike wants to tell me something", Jane explained.

Mike's blood ran cold when the chief's eyes heavily landed on him. He would rather if Hopper started yelling instead of looking at him that way.

"Does he?", he spoke the two monosyllabic words very slowly "What are you goin' to tell her, buddy?".

"I... I...", Mike stuttered.

"He says it's important", Jane spoke.

Mike glared at her with evident fear on his face.

"I'm sure it is", Hopper thoughtfully said.

"It's about the...", Mike gestured to the chief with his right hand, turning it upside-down.

Hopper frowned and leaned closer to him in the bench. He was now truly concerned.

"What about it?", he asked.

"It's... A question I have; a personal one. That's why I need to ask her and *only* her", Mike explained.

Hopper eyed the kid. Was he lying? He couldn't tell. What could be so important about that hell of a place? Could it be something that Mike and Jane had discussed before she went missing in 1983? He knew that they had spent some time together way before he properly got to know her. The cop inhaled deeply.

"Alright", he said, getting up from the bench "But I want to hear the whole story after".

Mike nodded.

"And what about that fight with that other kid? Are you all good now?", Hopper fatherly asked to Jane.

"I'm going to tell her that I'm sorry", she explained.

"Yeah, you probably should", Hopper confirmed and gestured for the group to follow him.

Mike tried his best to remain calm as they walked. He couldn't let Hopper find out that he was lying about the Upside-Down. The boy hated himself for picking *that* subject, but he had no other choice if he wanted to hide his true intentions from the chief.

Truth to be said, that wasn't a very appropriate moment to take El on a Ferris wheel ride, but he had planned it for a *long* time and he wouldn't let a stupid arguing with Max ruin it.

This is it, Mike thought with his heart racing, I'm going to tell El that I love her.

"Stop following me, Stalker!", Max said, wiping her eyes with her sleeve.

"Just slow down!", Lucas said "I just want to talk".

"Go talk to El, then", she said.

Lucas could swear that her voice sounded a bit clumsy, as if she was about to cry, if not already crying.

"Hey!", he said, finally reaching her and grabbing her shoulder.

"I'm done, alright?!", she snapped, turning around "Every time I feel like you guys are accepting me, one of you just treats me like shit!".

"Max, you have to understand that she doesn't know much about people. She spent twelve years...", Lucas started

"I don't have to understand shit!", she yelled "You are always defending her because you don't know how it feels when she can't stand you".

Lucas inhaled. If anyone else in the party knew what being wary of El and having issues bonding with El, it was him. The boy sighed.

"Have I told you about that time when she almost killed me?", he said.

He had purposely omitted that part from the story he told Max about Will's vanishing in 1983, mostly because it was irrelevant, but also because it was a bit humiliating for him.

Max raised an eyebrow.

"Wait, what? H-how?".

"Well, I pissed her off and...", Lucas stopped and looked around "Can we talk somewhere else?".

Max laughed.

"Why? Is it another top secret that we have to...", she sarcastically said.

"Yeah, it actually is", he interrupted.

Her sarcastic smile faded and she checked her surroundings, imitating his gesture.

"Are you actually serious?", she lowered her voice.

Lucas nodded.

"That's why we have to talk somewhere else", he said.

Max looked around in search of a safe spot.

"Where, then?", she eventually asked.

Lucas scanned the park for a few moments until his eyes caught a Ferris wheel monotonously spinning in the distance. It was about one hundred feet tall and each cabin could bear exactly two passengers. *Perfect.*

"There", he pointed at it.

Max eyed the ride and felt a chill crawling up her back.

"Are you kidding me?", she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"*That* is your idea of a perfectly safe place to discuss a serious matter", she accusingly said.

Lucas raised an eyebrow.

"Do you have any better ideas?", he asked.

Max opened her mouth to say something, but a gasping yell caught their attention.

"There you are, you little shits!", they heard a panting Steve rushing towards them with the most fatherly look on his face "Where the hell do you think you're going?!"

Lucas and Max eyed each other. The boy silently begged her for that chance, whispering 'please' so low that the girl barely heard it. Max closed her eyes and sighed.

That could be her last chance to stay in the only group of friends she ever had.

"We were just going to the Ferris Wheel", she said, forcing herself to smirk.

Next Chapter Preview: While Lucas takes for himself the seemingly impossible task to calm Max down, El and Mike share a romantic moments after they confess their feelings for each other. While Will reveals something shocking to Steve, Nancy has another episode that reveals her that something very dark is about to happen in Hawkins again.

8. Chapter Seven - The Eye of The Storm

[A/N] I'm SO happy that I'm finally posting another chapter. Sorry it took so long. School hasn't been very forgiving to me lately. Anyway, I won't delay the story any longer. Enjoy!

"It's like before a storm, you know? You can't see it, but you can feel it. Like this uh... Electricity" – Steve Harrington.

Steve sent a thankful nod to the girl working at a food tent as she handed him a steaming Styrofoam cup of coffee. It had been a long day and a warm, caffeinated drink was all he needed at the moment.

It didn't take much longer for the teenager to find a bench near the Ferris wheel from where he could watch Lucas and Max and make sure they'd be alright. He had lost track of Mike, but the boy seemed unable to be apart from Jane and so did Hopper, so as long as those two stuck together and Joyce stuck to Will, his main concern were Max and Lucas.

Besides, he didn't feel comfortable around Jane *at all*. Whoever that girl was... *Whatever* that girl was, she had killed countless people – And monsters – for what he knew and no one knew better than Steve how easy it was to make a thirteen-year-old kid pissed off. Who could guarantee that she wouldn't snap into a murderous tantrum whenever she felt like it? What kind of things she would do if she totally lost control?

"Hey", Will's voice startled him and made him turn back on the bench "Um... Can I sit here?".

There was the slightest pause.

"Yeah, yeah", Steve said, gesturing to the empty spot next to him on the bench "What's up, buddy? Where's the rest of the guys?".

"Oh, they're over there".

Will made a vague motion towards Mike and El stepping in the line to the Ferris wheel, the boy talking frenetically while the girl remained silent. Steve couldn't see Joyce or Hopper anywhere, but he assumed that they were close. Unlike Mrs. Wheeler or Mrs. Henderson, Hopper and Mrs. Byers were concerned parents that always seemed to be one step away from losing their shit. Not that they didn't have a reason, but being constantly watched could be unsettling for a kid.

"So, about Jane...", Steve spoke, eyeing the girl with mistrust "What do you guys know about her?"

Will moved uncomfortably on the bench.

"I-I don't know... I wasn't around most of the time she was with the guys. All I know is that she saved my life", there was an uncomfortable pause "Twice".

"Does she... You know, what kind of stuff she usually does with her... Powers?", the teenager questioned.

He shrugged.

"I don't know", Will repeated "She never uses her powers. Hopper doesn't let her".

So she actually might be dangerous, Steve thought.

"Yeah, but the guys sure told you about it, right? Is it like... Super strength or...?", he said.

"No, it's like...", the boy thought for a moment "She can move stuff with her mind, like throw stuff in the air and levitate people".

Steve looked back at the couple of kids that had now moved a little bit forward in the line.

"That's not funny, alright?", he whispered.

"I'm not joking!", Will protested "Ask any of the guys. They said that she lifted a van, once".

Holy shit, she's dangerous.

"A van", Steve waited for the boy to confirm it, which he did with a shy nod "A-alright, so, what exactly keeps her from getting mad and using her powers to hurt other people, then?".

"She doesn't want to", Will looked around to make sure no one else paid attention to the conversation "Even if she did, she knows that the guys from the lab still might be looking for her and she's *terrified* of them. We all are, actually".

Steve thoughtfully moved his chin sideways before taking another sip of the coffee. Will looked disappointingly at Mike and El, who were about to board the ride.

"Besides, she has this weird crush on Mike, so she's afraid to do anything bad around him", he sighed.

Steve followed his eyes and noticed that he wouldn't look away from the couple.

"Yeah, I'm sorry for you buddy. I felt this same pain before", he said, leaning back on the bench "I mean, it's weird that you chose *her* out of all people, but...".

"What are you talking about?", Will asked.

Steve gestured at El.

"You have a crush on her".

"What? No!", Will's eyes went wide.

"You can't hide it, my friend. I saw you looking at her like this the whole day", he said.

"Like what?!", the boy said.

"Like, you know...Like she's a beautiful painting in a museum. You can't touch her, you can't take her with you, but you look at her wishing that you could", he said.

He was yet to discover that his metaphors were arguably lame.

"No, I'm not!", Will said.

Steve smiled and took another sip of his beverage.

"Alright then", he said "As you want".

Will looked at the floor in embarrassment and then up at the line. Mike and El weren't there anymore, which meant that they were in the ride already. The boy thought for a bit, checked his surroundings once more and turned his attention back to Steve, who was looking ahead with his arms supported on the backrest of the bench. He sighed.

"Steve, can I tell you a secret?".

He looked down at the boy.

"Sure", he simply said.

"But you can't tell *anyone*", Will said "Not even mom or Jonathan. You have to promise that you'll keep it".

Steve nodded and crossed his legs.

"Alright, I promise. What is it?", he took a swig of coffee.

Will opened his mouth to speak and it took him a few seconds to find the appropriate words.

"I don't have a crush on El. Actually I, uh... I have a crush on *Mike*".

Steve choked on his drink, coughing loudly and spilling it on his face and on his clothes.

"Y-y-you...", he started, wiping the coffee from his nose in a nothing discrete way "That's uh... Are you serious?".

Will nodded. He seemed ashamed of what he just said.

"Well, that's um... For how long, exactly?", Steve asked.

The boy shrugged.

"Since... Since I met him, I guess. But I only noticed it last year, after I first saw the Shadow Monster", he said "Back then, Mike was... I don't know; he was the only one helping me besides mom. He was there for me all the time and I guess..."

He didn't finish the sentence. Steve was trying his best to not let the shock become visible.

"What should I do?", Will asked, on the brink of tears.

Steve sighed and wiped the rest of the coffee from his face.

"It's complicated. You like a guy who's dating a girl, so, you know, he's not into it and he's with someone else already", 'Even if this someone is really freaking dangerous', Steve thought "I think you shouldn't do anything. It's only gonna break your heart and you really don't need any of that crap right now".

Will looked back at the floor and stood quiet. Steve eyed him for a solid moment.

"But that doesn't make you a bad person, you know?", Steve said "It's nothing to be ashamed of".

The boy raised his head in surprise.

"Really?".

"Yeah, it's just a bit different. And just because there are some assholes out there who hate anything that's different, it doesn't mean that they're right and you're wrong", Steve comforted him "Just relax. You're still young. You're going to find someone that likes you, some day".

"You think so?", the boy asked.

"Yeah, I really do", Steve said, giving him an encouraging smile "Just give it some time, okay?".

Will nodded and let a timid grin sprout on his face.

"Okay".

Steve got up to throw the now empty coffee cup in a nearby trashcan, but Will detained him.

"Steve?".

The teenager halted and turned around.

"Yeah?".

"Thank you".

Steve smiled.

"No problem, buddy. That's what I'm here for".

Before Steve reached the trashcan, he caught a lamp post flickering on and off with the corner of his eye. At first, he didn't worry, but by the time he was walking back to the bench, many other electric light sources started flickering, including the lights on the sides of the Ferris wheel.

"What's going on?", he asked now that he was close enough for Will to hear him.

"I-I don't know".

Now all the lights of the park flickered at their own rhythm, hysterically flashing their bright colors before turning off for a split second. At last, they all went on again, but instead of spilling peaceful and joyful lights across the fair, they started getting brighter in a way that was so uncomfortably familiar to Will that made his skin crawl. For a strange moment, the whole place was immersed in blinding lights.

Then they all went off.

"I must admit, this is way better than the movie", Nancy said, holding a pink half-eaten cotton candy on her hand as they carelessly walked through the fair.

Jonathan chuckled.

"You think so?", he sarcastically asked, walking with his hands on his pockets.

She faked an analyzing expression and looked around in silence.

"Let me see...", she gave two steps to the side as if carefully inspecting the place "I'm at a fair, I'm having the greatest time of my life and I'm with the most handsome man in the world", she looked at him seductively.

"The most handsome man?", he playfully doubted.

She simply lifted her eyebrows as if confirming what she had just said. He slid his hand under her hair and gave her a long kiss. They both stared deep into each other's eyes at the end of it. She smiled and gave him another kiss.

"Yeah", she said "The most handsome man in the whole world".

It was his time to smile. Maybe, just maybe, there was such thing as 'back to normal', after all and Nancy was there to prove it. Right, not everything was perfect, but at least they were making some progress. Will didn't have any episodes in three months, Nancy looked way happier lately and the Jonathan suspected that there was some sort of chemistry going on between his mom and Hopper. That was none of his business, but if that spark of affection developed into something bigger, it could distract her from all of the recent stress, not to mention the grief.

"How come I've been so lucky to finally be with you?", he asked.

"Well... We went to this crazy guy's house, he helped us to shut down the lab and while we were there, things just sort of...", she said, remembering the day they visited Murray Bauman "Worked out".

"Yeah, tell me about it", he said, smoothly leaning forwards.

When their faces were so close that they almost touched each other's lips, the Upside Down haunted Nancy again.

The tents vanished and so did the rides and the people. The fair was just a huge concrete yard at the end of which she could see the town covered in dark vines and dead plants. The lights flickered every now and then and the moss on the floor was even thicker out there.

That was the first time she got to see the sky in the Upside Down and now she understood why the place was so dark. There was an omnipresent blanket of pitch black clouds covering the sky and blocking all light, except for the crimson thunders that cut the air and flashed red above the ground.

Some thunders seemed to try to reach the same place on the horizon behind her, flickering red as they lit up the darkness, which drew her attention to that spot. One of them managed to shoot out a stronger light as it cut the air towards the ground, spotlighting an absolutely huge black figure with a slender head and many tentacles supporting its body above the floor. Nancy felt so terrified by simply being on its presence that she was suddenly unable to move. She could *feel* the evil that emanated from the imposing figure. She felt bad, she felt *corrupted* by looking at it, but she couldn't look away.

It stood above the trees, looking at the girl from above like a hawk. It let out a loud, imposing howl that echoed through the Upside Down.

Before she acknowledged that the thing was the very same creature that possessed Will, a much deeper, much more potent howl came from right behind the girl and when she turned around to look at it, she finally let her body absorb the shock and let out a terrified scream.

On the opposite end of the town, the sky also lit up, but not by occasional lighting strikes. It seemed as if the clouds themselves were glowing yellow, which gave that version of Hawkins a ghostly aspect.

Walking through the city, another massive figure was highlighted by the yellow clouds. It had a more solid appearance than the other monster, with a quadruped silhouette and a rough, reptilian-like skull with no eyes. It roared once more, displaying rows of huge sharp teeth and a much brighter yellow light that came from inside its throat. The spikes on top and on the sides of its head vibrated with the deafening sound and so did the spikes on its back.

The Mind Flayer responded with yet another howl and, coincidence or not, many lightning fiercely stroke the ground around it, making the sky bleed. With her limbs weak and eyes soaked, Nancy realized that she stood right in the middle of a battleground.

Without a warning, the Shadow Monster started to move towards the opponent, gliding above Hawkins with a frightening grace and sliding its tentacles through the air.

The opponent didn't hesitate before it started charging towards the Shadow Monster, knocking down buildings like sand castles on its way towards fight. Its mouth opened wide in a primal battle cry.

Suddenly, Nancy was involved in a swirling column of black specs and she somehow knew that she was *inside* one of the Mind Flayer's tentacles. She felt the air vanishing from her lungs as she inhaled the ashes that made her throat feel sore. Her heart raced so fast that it hurt her chest. She could see everything ending at that moment, inside that spinning tornado of nothing but the filthiest kind of evil.

A choir of confused voices replaced the beastly battle cries. The night was still cold, but not as cold as the other version of the fair. The black ashes had vanished. Everything went back to normal.

"Nancy!".

She desperately inhaled and felt her limbs aching as she looked at Jonathan, terrified. The boy was shaking her shoulders as he yelled her name. His face was red and his eyes were wide open. A little crowd had formed around the couple to check on what was happening. All the lights around seemed to be off, but that wasn't the girl's main concern right now. A part of her now knew that the lights were merely a symptom of the issue.

"Nancy, what happened? Are you okay?".

Tell him. You don't have much time. Nancy didn't have time to worry about how that thought had slipped into her mind like someone was whispering it in her ear. She got up without saying a word and grabbed his hand.

"Jonathan, we have to leave. *Now*", she said "I think I just had an episode".

"This isn't funny, Stalker", she said, sitting in front of the boy with her arms and legs crossed.

"It isn't meant to be funny! She literally threw me back in the air", Lucas explained.

Max shook her head and gave him an ironic smirk.

"And what, exactly, does that have to do with me anyway?", she asked.

"I'm trying to tell you that El isn't exactly adapted to our world. She grew up in a lab. You had to see how she first looked at me and Dustin when she met us; she was *terrified*. It takes a while for her to get used to people", Lucas spoke.

"And you still managed to be friends with her after a week. I've been waiting for three months, Stalker!", Max replied.

"I don't know, maybe... Maybe she's just jealous of you", he said.

"Jealous?", she spoke as if the idea was funny to her.

"Yeah, think about it: She had to stay alone with Hopper for a year and when she comes back, she sees a stranger hanging out with us. Of course she wouldn't understand what's going on", Lucas spoke.

Max laughed with disgust.

"Besides, she didn't use her powers on you", he added "That means she probably doesn't really hate you".

"Are you trying to convince me that she likes me now?", she asked.

"No, I'm trying to convince you that you could get along with her if you explained that you're not a threat", Lucas explained.

"A threat?", Max asked "Yeah, like *I'm* the one with crazy superpowers!".

Lucas sighed.

"Not *that* kind of threat", he tried to explain it to her "Just... Let me talk to Mike. He will talk her into apologizing to you and you'll show her that everything is fine. If you forgive her, she will realize that there's no reason to hate you".

She thought for a bit.

"What if it doesn't work?".

"Trust me, it will work", Lucas said.

She looked through the window to think, immediately regretting after seeing the ground dozens of feet below her. She would've backed away from the glass if the hundreds of blinking lights hadn't caught her attention.

"What the hell is going on down there?".

Lucas followed Max's eyes to spot the unusual scene. The lights underneath them were flickering on and off like Christmas lights.

Christmas lights.

"Uh oh", he said.

Max opened her mouth to ask something else, but before she could make out the first word, all the lights went off and the Ferris wheel stopped. The sun had set half an hour ago, giving space to the night, so everything went pitch black.

"What's going on?!", she asked, widening her eyes.

"Relax, the power just went down", Lucas said.

"Yeah, no shit!".

"Why are you acting so nervous?", the boy questioned.

"I'm *not*, okay?!", Max spoke with her hands shaking.

Lucas eyed her for a moment.

"Holy shit", he said "You're scared of heights".

"What? No! That's stupid", she said.

"Oh yeah? Then look down".

Max slowly peeked through the window of the ride. They were almost at the very top of it and she could see the confused people walking around down below. That was a ninety feet fall. She quickly pulled her head back and closed her eyes.

"Alright, I'm scared of heights, okay?!", she said, not looking into his eyes "Are you happy now, Stalker?".

"Why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't have brought you here if I knew it", Lucas spoke.

"Because...", she started with increasing frustration on her voice "I didn't want to look like a scared baby to you guys. You're always doing cool stuff and I'm just... I'm just lame"

"What are you talking about? You're MadMax! *The MadMax!* You're the one who's a pro at every single game at the arcade and can ride a skate better than anyone at school!", Lucas said "Do you think that any regular kid would literally drive us to the Upside Down? Or fight your psycho brother with a baseball bat?".

She shrugged.

"Yeah, I know, but... It feels like you guys have more history and I'm just new to all of this", she spoke "And besides, you guys have Eleven now, so..."

"Yeah, she's cool and all, but... She isn't tubular!", he gestured with his hands next to his head.

Max chuckled and looked up at Lucas

"You're the only one who still says that, you know?".

"And you're the only one who calls me 'Stalker'", he responded.

"Well, it's an appropriate nickname", she joked.

They went quiet for a few seconds.

"Hey, you're not freaking out about the height anymore", Lucas pointed out.

Realizing that it was true, Max resisted to the wild impulse to look back down and focused on the boy's eyes.

"Well, I guess I just really like being around you, Stalker", she said.

"Seriously, can you stop calling me that?".

She smirked.

"You're so cute when you're mad".

"I'm not-", he started.

He wasn't expecting her to lean closer and giving him a long kiss, so he flinched when she did. They stood in silence when she pulled herself away, both looking awkwardly to each other.

"Thanks for not letting the guys give up on me", she finally said "I know I'm an asshole sometimes".

"Hey, you're not, okay? And we would never give up on you!", Lucas said.

She smiled.

"I really like you, Stalker".

He smiled back.

"I really like you, MadMax".

They were leaning closer once again when the Ferris wheel started to shake. Max jumped back and grabbed Lucas' hand.

"What was that?", she asked.

"Hey, relax! Maybe it's the power trying to come back on", he tried to sound more confident than he felt.

Something flashed red behind Max, barely bright enough for Lucas to see. Highlighted by dim red lights that danced above the clouds, a massive creature stood right above the Ferris wheel, supported by five tentacles bigger than buildings. Lucas always thought that Will's drawing of it was scary, but that was straight up terrifying.

It lasted for only a brief moment, so fast that it was gone by the time Max had turned her head to check the source of the red light.

"What was that?!", she said.

Now Lucas was the one shaking.

"Judgment day", he mumbled.

An invisible force crashed like a wrecking ball into the side of the Ferris wheel and the ride tipped to the side. All that Lucas could hear as he felt himself getting closer to the ground was Max screaming at the top of her lungs.

Mike could feel her big hazel eyes analyzing him interrogatively at the instant they sat inside the Ferris wheel. They were the last two people boarding the ride, so it started spinning as soon as the door of their cabin was closed. It was a round blue metal cabin with glass windows that allowed them to see the fair from above. It was a small ride, so it had only enough space for two passengers to sit in front of each other.

The boy exhaled heavily to try to calm his racing heart before he looked up at El. Every time she looked at him, he couldn't help but remember that confused and helpless girl who had lived on his basement. Every time she spoke, she reminded him of when she asked if she was still pretty. Every time they kissed, it felt like the first one.

"Mike?", El called.

"Yeah?", he spoke.

"You're quiet".

"Uh, yeah, I'm...", he started, scratching his neck "I-I have to tell you something, but it's complicated."

She blinked twice. Since there was no interruption, he proceeded.

"It's not about the Upside Down. I made that up", he saw her interrogative look get yet more confused "But it's something about us, something important".

Jane still stared attentively at the boy with no signs of interrupting him.

"Do you remember the first time I asked you to go to the Snow Ball with me?", Mike asked.

"Yes".

"Well, um... What I was trying to say that night was that... When I said that you can't go with a sister or a friend because you usually go with someone special, with someone you really like", he spoke.

El nodded. She couldn't forget that night even if she tried.

"And uh... This someone is someone special to you, someone you feel something for", he explained.

"Feel?", she asked.

"Well, yeah. Like, you get super nervous around them or keep thinking of them all the time and you know that you'd do anything for this person", Mike explained.

She gasped. He was describing precisely how she felt around him.

"Sometimes you just kind of like the person and it's not a big deal", Mike said and avoided using Lucas and Max as an example "But sometimes you really *feel* something big for this person and you just... You just want to be with them. That's how you know that you're in love with them and I, uh...", he stumbled on his own words.

"Mike?", she said with a timid and childish smile "Do you... Love me?", she asked.

He blushed and widened his eyes.

"Y-yeah", he clumsily stuttered with no option but confirming the fact.

She felt her chest getting tighter and her face getting warmer. Love! Mike was in actual love, just like in the soap operas. Jane had always heard of that mysterious and powerful feeling in the TV, but no one had ever explained it to her. Apparently, it was something you could feel by anyone, like your mom or your brother, but usually a boy and a girl were in love in the TV and they kissed each other a lot. So that's why Mike kissed her so often!

"I'm sorry El. This was just stupid. I shouldn't have said that. It probably just freaked you out. I understand if you don't love me", he said, lowering his head.

She gripped his arm, which made him stare straight into her deep dark eyes when he looked up.

"Mike, I love you too", she said.

He could swear that his heart had skipped a beat.

"Y-you do?".

She nodded. Mike stood still on his seat, trying to muster enough confidence to speak, but no words came to his shocked mind.

The uncomfortable silence that fell upon the cabin seemed to draw them closer, because before Mike realized it, they were both standing up and their faces were mere inches away from each other. He grabbed her shaky hands into his, only to find out that he was also shaking. El still stared at him like he was made of Eggos and smiled when he reciprocated the look. She leaned forward very slowly and closed her eyes when her lips met Mike's.

They had kissed many times before, but this wasn't a shy, quick smooch like the other ones. It was a long, slow and vivid kiss. El

rested her hands on Mike's shoulders as he held her waist. After many seconds, they drew themselves away from the kiss, but not from each other. They stood there in silence, just speechlessly staring into each other's eyes.

As if only to ruin that perfect little moment, the ride completely stopped and all the lights went off. El pulled herself closer to Mike and pressed her head against his chest.

"Mike...?".

The atmosphere had changed significantly as if the darkness itself wasn't the whole issue. He looked at the town in the distance to realize that Hawkins had been completely immersed in shadows. The sight made a glimpse of a doubt sprout in his mind. Whenever something, *anything* bad happened in Hawkins, it wasn't what it seemed to be, for better or for worse. He had stopped believing coincidences a long time ago. Most people would think that a boy getting lost for a week or a runaway girl appearing in the woods were mere accidents, but they never were. Nothing there was an accident anymore. Mike realized something was happening in Hawkins again, which was absolutely terrifying.

"Just stay calm, alright? The power should be back on soon", he said.

It took him a while to realize that the people who held Jane captive at the local Department of Energy, which had been permanently shut down, were also the people in charge to handle incidents like that.

Crap.

Jane also looked worriedly to the dark town and frowned. She had never seen lights go off like that before. Of course, she had been exposed to dark and confined spaces before, most of them back in her childhood at the lab, but they were *outside* now. There was no way so many lights had stopped working at once... Right?

The ride shook and she firmly grabbed his hand.

"I'm scared", she said.

Part of Mike understood it. She was just a girl of his age who had

been through a lot in her life. She had the right of being scared, he was scared too.

Another part of Mike was deeply worried though, because that girl next to him also happened to be Eleven, and whenever she got scared, she had a strong reason for it.

A grim red light flashed right above them, which drew their attention. Whatever it was, it was gone by the time the boy looked at it.

"What was that?", he asked.

El looked straight at the direction from which the light had emanated as if expecting to see it again, but it was gone now. Though the girl couldn't get a second look at it, she clearly saw the gargantuan silhouette of a shapeless monster.

"Upside Down", she whispered.

It felt like a house had crashed into the Ferris wheel's side and knocked it out of its foundation. As Mike and El saw the ground getting closer and felt the wind in their hair rushing faster and faster, their only instinct was to protect each other. Mike wrapped El up in his arms and sunk his fingers in her hair, turning his back against the floor to spare her from the impact. Jane's nose started to bleed.

Next chapter preview: The incident at the fair brought kids, adults and teenagers together once again. Not all of the kids were left unharmed and now lives may be at risk. When Kali loses her track, she finds out the kind of mysteries Mirkwood hides.

9. Chapter Eight - Every Breath

[A/N] Yes. I am posting again (finally). Welp, this chapter wasn't easy to write. Hopefully you'll enjoy it, though. Thanks for all the support you guys have been showing me so far! It really keeps me going!

Enjoy!

"They can't save you"

"No. But I can save them" – Kali Prasad and Jane Hopper.

"Ah, shit. Mrs. Sinclair is gonna *kill* me", said Steve as he looked up at the Ferris wheel.

A few people started gathering around, most likely friends and family of the passengers inside the Ferris wheel. A nervous rumbling chat ran through the dark silhouettes around the park. Steve made sure to keep Will close in case anything happened. Knowing the boy's history, that was a wise choice to make.

"T...They're gonna be fine, right? I mean... El is there", the boy spoke.

"Yeah, why wouldn't they be fine? It's just a blackout", the teenager said.

Will looked up at Steve with an expression that showed a mature and rational concern rather than the childish fear of the dark.

"It's not just a blackout", he said "It's the Upside Down".

The teenager frowned.

"What? No; listen. The power just went out, okay? This has nothing to do with that place", Steve tried to comfort him.

Will didn't look away from the Ferris wheel.

"It has", Will said "It, I don't know how... I guess this *feels* familiar to me"

The boy's voice was shaking, but there wasn't a trace of doubt in it. Steve gulped and looked at the ride once again. Suddenly, Mrs. Sinclair wasn't his main concern anymore.

"Will!".

The nearly-insane screech caught not only Will's attention, but also startled almost every other person nearby. Before the boy knew it, Hopper and Joyce came running towards them through the crowd and the woman pulled her son into a tight hug.

"Oh, Will, thank God you're okay".

The boy would normally try to unwrap himself from her arms and tell her she didn't have a reason to worry, but this time he remained still and silent for there was a real risk there, one that the boy couldn't see or hear. Not without his now memories.

"Oh, God. Please tell me Jane isn't there!", Hopper said, looking up at the ride.

Steve just glanced at the cop, wishing that he could do something, *anything* about it, but right now no one at the fair knew what was actually happening, so their best bet was stay there and pray for the power to come back on.

Hopper's hand instinctively went to his belt, but it didn't reach anything. The chief wasn't there on duty, so he didn't have any of his gadgets with him, which meant that he would have to go back to the jeep if he wanted to communicate with the station. He was just as helpless as any of those bystanders.

"Hopper?", a vaguely familiar masculine voice called.

Joyce, Steve, Will and the chief turned around to see a panting and horrified couple in the dark, which were immediately recognized as Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers.

"The hell are you two doing here?", Hopper asked.

"I... We...", the boy started explaining.

"We have to get out of here *now!*", Nancy interrupted "We don't have much time".

"Kid, listen. It's not that simple...", Hopper started.

"She's right", Will said, sounding more scared than ever, which was something alarming when it came to Will Byers "Something bad is going to happen".

It immediately clicked for Joyce and Hopper. The feeling of safety that they had learned to live with for the past months had blinded them from the obvious truth. That blackout wasn't normal. Joyce knew better than anyone that the lights were the first symptom of the presence of that awful place that haunted her life for a year.

The thought of the Upside Down made Hopper realize what had actually killed Jason Allen's dog. The wounds on the animal, the way the cuts were deep in the abdomen and the teeth marks on the throat... It was the same damn thing that had killed Bob Newbie.

He looked at the Ferris wheel again.

"Oh, no", he barely murmured.

"Let's go!", Nancy yelled with an urge that didn't quite feel that it came from her.

"We can't!", Steve said, pointing at the ride "The kids are in there!".

The girl widened her eyes. That was exactly where the shadow was heading when it immersed her in that dark, cold cloud of ashes. She didn't know it, but something in the back of her brain made her *feel* that the shock between the two immense beasts would affect her world as well.

"We gotta get them out of there!", Nancy said "You need to do something!".

"I can't! Even if I had my radio with me, it'd take over twenty minutes for any units to arrive", Hopper explained.

"You don't understand! The Ferris wheel is about to...", the girl's sentence was interrupted by a blow of cold air followed by a misty red light that highlighted a gargantuan silhouette hovering right above the Ferris wheel.

Mere moments later, the ride seemed to knock itself out of its own foundation and started to descend towards the ground; slowly at first, but then it started gaining speed as it leaned to the side. Metal creaked and screws snapped lose while the crowd dispersed to avoid getting hit by the metal structure.

"No!", Hopper's voice was somehow louder than all of the screams around.

As loud as the desperate cry could be, it was hopeless. The Ferris wheel was already leaning sideways and it was just a matter of time until it crashed and killed everyone in it, including Jane. Hopper could already imagine the shock and the loud metallic clang that would be followed by the death of yet another one of his daughters.

That's when they all heard Jane screaming.

It took a second for Jane to realize that she couldn't do it. It felt like trying to lift a fridge with her bare hands. The Ferris wheel was simply too big and heavy for her. Her nose spilled blood faster than ever before as she gave everything that she had to try to stop the falling ride.

Everything felt so slow; Mike's warm breath on her head was barely noticeable as tears started to roll down her cheeks. She couldn't save him, she thought, closing her eyes. Uninvited memories came in brief flashes, almost feeling like they were in slow-motion in her rushing mind.

She opened her eyes, which now were red with many cracks plainly visible within them and let out a sob laden with a heavy mix of anger, fear and sadness. The sob turned into a loud cry, which eventually grew into a scream while the memories fueled her rage.

"Sorry", he said, seeming a bit embarrassed after trying to touch her wrist "I just never saw a kid with a tattoo before. Eleven... What does it mean?".

Why were people always asking her that? And why was that boy being gentle to her? It almost felt as if he was afraid of hurting her, unlike Papa. She pointed at herself as if the words were needless.

"Eleven", El spoke.

"Is... Is that your name?".

She nodded.

"Um, okay... My name is Mike, short for Michael", it was the first time she heard his name "Maybe we can call you El, short for Eleven".

It was the first time she heard her nickname.

"It's day 353", his voice echoed in the darkness.

El walked closer to him.

"I had a bad day today. I don't know, I..."

Every single day he would sit there, in her little fort, and pick up his radio.

"I guess I wish you were here".

And he would call her.

"I mean, we all do".

Always on channel eleven.

"If you're out there, just, please, give me a sign",

But she would never answer.

Jane walked through the static water in the dark and knelt in front of him. Their eyes met and, only for an elusive moment, she allowed herself to believe that he could see her as well.

"Mike", she called.

His chin dropped and he pulled the radio away from his face.

"Eleven?".

She couldn't take it anymore. Mike was suffering without of her. She was also suffering, struggling every single day to keep the 'Don't Be Stupid' rules, to stay low and not be discovered by the bad men until some day, in a distant future when 'soon' arrived, she could talk to him: 'Mike, I'm here. I'm okay'. 'I can hear you'. 'I miss you. But that day seemed to crawl further away at every minute.

Well, 'soon' was too far away and she had run out of patience.

El carefully reached out for his face. All it would take for him to notice her, to see her was a touch, a single touch. Her hand was shaking. Would Hopper ever know that she did that? If so, would the bad men know, too? She didn't care. She needed Mike.

Now he had also run out of patience. Mike angrily shut down his radio and got up from his fort, frustrated.

They both cried for each other on that Halloween night.

Every breath you take,

She felt... Weird. In a good way, hopefully.

Every move you make;

He was waiting for her when she opened the door of the gym, with no sign of Will, or Dustin, or Lucas... Or Max around this time.

Every bond you break, every step you take, I'll be watching you.

Their eyes met at the same instant, both kids speechless.

Every single day, every word you say;

They obeyed to that invisible force that always drove them closer, not

daring to look away from each other's eyes. Mike opened a goofy smile and broke the silence filled only by the song and by the other kids chattering.

"Y-you look beautiful".

Not just pretty; 'beautiful'! She blushed and looked at her feet in embarrassment, hoping that he wouldn't notice her childish smirk.

Every game you play, every night you stay, I'll be watching you.

Mike glanced at the students scattered around the place, either dancing or chatting, except for Nancy and Jonathan, who were in charge of serving the drinks and taking pictures and Dustin, who was nowhere to be seen.

"...Do you wanna dance?".

Oh, can't you see... You belong to me...

"I... Don't know how", she replied.

He shrugged.

"I don't either. Do you wanna figure it out?"

She nodded.

My poor heart aches with every step you take.

They held hands and shyly walked to the dance floor. Mike clumsily helped El out with the basic movements and soon they were dancing together in the Snow Ball.

Every move you make, every vow you break; every smile you fake, every claim you stake, I'll be watching you.

Just like he had promised.

Since you've gone, I've been lost without a trace; I dream at night, I can only see your face; I look around but it's you I can't replace.

Mike was quiet, which wasn't exactly bad, since El had never been talkative, but the boy was rarely silent in her presence. He just kept

dancing with her, staring into her eyes while she stared back into his.

I feel so cold and I long for your embrace;

She didn't remember how it happened, but she would never forget that it did. She was ready for the kiss this time. It had startled her last time, but now she knew what to expect. She didn't know how much she needed to kiss Mike until then.

The kiss faded back into a timid stare and they both smiled. El rested her head in his chest, like she had seen people doing in the TV. She wasn't quite sure why, but this felt like the right time to do it.

While resting in Mike's arms, she closed her eyes and her smile widened. Everything was okay. 'Soon' had arrived. She had a dad, one that wouldn't ever hurt her and Mike was finally there with her. Nothing bad was going to happen ever again. She was sure of it.

I keep crying, baby, baby, please...

It all felt slow.

Everything flashed blue and red. The lights of the ambulances and police patrol cars (the only lights to be seen in miles) flooded the crash scene. People were talking... Why were they talking so loud and so fast, though? She looked through the cracked window of the cabin, which now faced upwards, showcasing the clouds above. Her head, her nose and her ears felt like they were literally burning. Jane had only felt like that twice before.

Voices coming from the other cabins showed that her aching mind and bleeding nose weren't hurting in vain, though. She had made it. She stopped the Ferris wheel mere inches from the ground. The whole thing bounced up before it even hit the floor, pushed by the magnet-like energy and then slid back down without enough speed to harm anyone, or so Jane hoped.

She moved back to see Mike and for an instant she was frightened he didn't make it. Her weak hands could barely hold his shoulders while she inspected the boy. His eyes were closed. He wasn't moving.

"Mike?", she whispered.

He didn't respond.

"Mike", she tried to scream again, but her sore throat only allowed a painful croak to come out.

She couldn't muster enough strength to shake him awake, so she helplessly stared at him until the tears started rolling down her face. She hugged Mike, pushing her head into his chest just like she used to do when they were alone with each other.

Except that now they weren't alone.

"Cal, help me out!", she barely heard the voice of one of the policemen who worked for her father "Kid, look at me; we're gonna get you both out of here, alright?".

It took her a while to understand that the officers Powell and Callahan had crawled in the ruined ride to rescue her and Mike. The officer with glasses knelt next to the boy, pressed his head against his chest and nodded to himself.

"They're alive, chief! Thank god, they're alive!", Callahan said while picking him up.

Jane felt Mike being pulled away from her and immediately started to protest.

"No...", she mumbled "Mike... Mike".

There was nothing else she could do while the officer picked him up from the floor and pulled them both out of the cabin.

"Kid, listen to me", she saw Powell talking to her as he gently picked her up from the floor "He's gonna be alright. He's just unconscious. You're gonna see him later, I promise".

"Pro...Mise...?", she barely whispered.

"Yeah, big-time promise", he said.

Jane closed her eyes and let everything go dark as pain wrecked her body and the familiar smell of blood filled her nostrils. Rushed footsteps approached the two officers and Hopper immediately started talking:

"How bad is it?"

"Pretty bad, chief", Powell said in an equally worried voice "You should take her to the hospital.

Hopper went quiet for a brief moment.

"Alright, save the ambulances for the other victims; we don't know how many more people can be injured. I'll take Jane to the hospital myself".

"You sure, chief? She looks really messed up... Alright, alright! I was just saying. You don't have to look at me like that!", Callahan said.

Jane was handed to someone else and the smell of blood was somewhat masked by the scent of cigarette and a sweet feminine fragrance.

"It's alright. It's alright sweetie. Just breathe, okay?", she heard a familiar voice speaking.

She was on Joyce's arms. Knowing that felt comforting. Joyce was the closest thing to a mom that she ever had; even closer than Terry. She unconsciously pressed her body towards Joyce for protection and groaned again. The woman started walking. She heard Nancy talking way to fast to Hopper for her to understand what she was saying.

"What the hell just happened?!", Jonathan exclaimed somewhere behind her.

"We'll tell you guys in the way, we need to get the hell out of here!", Hopper spoke, walking beside Joyce.

Somewhere near, Max was crying. Was it because of Mike? Maybe not, maybe the ride had almost hit her. Had she possibly been in the ride? Jane didn't know and didn't care. All that she knew was that her sobs sounded annoying.

They eventually left the crowd and they left the flashing lights behind; which was relieving to El, and they got in a car. It didn't feel like Hopper's car.

"Why aren't we taking them to a hospital?!", Nancy's question was followed by the dry click of a sit belt being buckled.

"Because they'd ask questions at the hospital", Joyce spoke, carefully leaving El in one of the backseats "They'd see her tattoo and that's exactly what we *don't* want to happen".

"What about Mike? What if...!".

"Nancy", Joyce interrupted, getting in the driver's seat and turning the vehicle on "I've been dealing with this for a whole year and I know that there is nothing they can do about it at the hospital that we can't do ourselves at home. They're fine. Mike is not hurt and El is just drained".

By then, the car was already moving. The noise of the engine was bothering El. Someone was sitting beside her, but whoever it was, they were too quiet for her to recognize who it was. The thought that it could be Mike had driven her to slightly open her eyes and recognize Will's silhouette in the dark. Beside him, Mike sat motionless.

Nancy was about to ask what Joyce meant with 'drained' when El started crying again.

"Mike...!".

"Hold on, sweetie, we're almost there, we're gonna be fine, alright?".

Jane could only recognize horror in Nancy's and Will's faces before she passed out.

The barking could be heard for over a mile. Chester wasn't quite the quietest dog in Hawkins. Standing up on the couch and supporting his front paws on the window sill, the Byers' dog barked to the pitch black night outside, wagging its tail. It could feel a strange energy in the dark and all it could do was trying to scare it away.

Chester barked for what seemed to be an unnecessarily long amount of time before the six lights glided into view and the so familiar humming of motors approached the house. Whining, the dog left the window and walked to the front door, where it would wait for his owners to open it. A primitive instinct drove the mutt to believe that Joyce's presence would fix everything, that she would somehow make that gloomy atmosphere fade away. The door was opened, the hinges croaked in the dark.

And suddenly the Byers' living room was filled with noise. A panicking Joyce walked in, followed by Will, Jonathan, Steve, who carried Mike on his arms and Nancy, who carried Jane on hers. Once inside, Jonathan left the room to get an emergency flashlight in the tool shed.

"Here, put her over here", Joyce said, gesturing to the couch as Steve carefully placed Mike on an armchair.

Nancy obeyed, carefully placing Jane on the couch. There was so much blood that it soaked her hands and part of her clothes. Hopper, who had arrived practically at the same time at the Byers' house with Lucas and Max, was slamming the door shut and running to the couch.

"How is she?", he asked.

"She passed out", Joyce informed, eyeing the girl worriedly.

Hopper went to the couch to check El. She had dry blood spilled all over her clothes, leaking from her nose and ears. Her skin was white as paper and her hands shook, even though she was still unconscious.

"Ah, shit", he mumbled "Alright, we're gonna need some bandages to clear the blood. How's the boy holding up?"

"He's alright; he's just knocked out", Nancy said, standing next to the chair where her brother lay down.

"Alright, great", Hopper pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to think straight "How about you two? Are you okay? Any wound, any scratch?".

The question was to Lucas and Max. The girl was completely silent, breathing heavily as Lucas hugged her closely and refused to let her go. Next to the couple, Will stood in silence, white as paper. Lucas seemed to be the only one who had recovered from the shock already.

"Yeah, we're fine. No one else got hurt", Max spoke for both of them, looking at El "She saved us".

Jonathan came back in the room with an old red torch that was starting to show signs of rust in its metallic edges. He turned it on, bringing a glimpse of proper light to the room. The torch flickered when he pointed it at Nancy. Only the girl noticed how Chester was whining at her in a corner.

"Get that out of my face!", Nancy said, trying to cover her eyes from the light.

"Sorry", Jonathan said, putting the object down on a table with the lens facing up so it could spread some light across the room, like a lamp.

Under better illumination, they could actually see how much blood covered Eleven's clothes and Will felt like he would throw up if he kept looking at it for too long. Her blue clothes were completely taken by red stains and her face was a complete red mess.

"Oh, Jesus!", Hopper said.

"Alright, you've seen enough, time to go", Steve said in a surprisingly responsible way as he tried to lead Lucas, Max and Will to Will's room.

"But what about...?", Lucas protested.

"It's gonna be *fine!* Now, move!", the teenager commanded.

Joyce left the room as well to get bandages, clean clothes and a bowl of water to clear the girl's blood, which she immediately started doing. She managed to clean the blood from her nostrils and ears, but her clothes were a whole different story. Mrs. Byers sighed. They'd have to wait for her to wake up to put clean clothes on her.

From the corner of the room, Nancy shivered and looked at Hopper and Joyce. She wanted to feel sorry for Jane. She loved the girl and after all she had done for all of them... Something kept her from feeling anything for her. What scared her most was the fact that she knew that the Shadow Monster was keeping her from sympathizing with El. She looked up at the two concerned parents.

"Mrs. Byers, I need to tell you something", she started, then looked at Jonathan, who looked back at her in confusion "I need to tell something to *all* of you".

"God *damn* it!", Kali hit the steering wheel with both her hands.

She stared at the patch of the road in front of her, only a dark and misty forest around for over a mile. She took deep, angry breaths as she tried to clear her mind. She had been tracking Jane down for two damned days until she finally spotted the girl minutes earlier at the fair. Much to the older girl's horror, her sister was barely conscious and covered in blood when she finally saw her. Her immediate reaction was to chase down the police chief and inquire about Jane's state. And God help him if she didn't like the answer.

Easier said than done, the thirty-year-old van she drove all the way from Pittsburgh wasn't fast enough to keep up with the chief's jeep and the two other cars. Now, after driving straight for about ten minutes with no other vehicles on sight, Kali found herself facing a bifurcation on the way and that's where she stood now, at the edge of a tantrum. Much to her despair, the headlights of the van started to flicker.

"You've gotta be kidding me", she hissed, hopelessly eyeing both sides of the road.

She pulled over to the side of the road and parked the van, but did not turn the engine off. Even though it seemed that they'd go off at any second now, the headlights were the last two things keeping her from the overwhelming darkness.

Kali had grown up in the worst scenarios someone could ever imagine for a child, including the cold hell that was Hawkins' lab,

which meant that she wasn't easily frightened, but the darkness was what terrified her the most, which was why she had chosen to live in the city, where there were always lights all around at all times, unlike her tiny cell in the lab. She could not think of that room without remembering the pain; physical and psychological.

And now she was back *there*, in Hawkins, the one place she would never want to go back to, and her only source of light was slowly fading away.

Usually Mick would solve that problem in a heartbeat, but Kali couldn't afford her gang of puppets anymore. They were mere failed experiments of hers. Helpless people whose pasts she had erased from their minds and replaced with fake memories and stereotypical backgrounds. Their sanity had lasted for a fairly long time, almost a two years before they all went mad.

Kali felt a sharp twinge of guilt when she remembered that she had almost made the same thing to Jane. She had almost made the girl think that Brenner was still alive, that she had a different life, a different past. If Jane hadn't resisted that night, she would be as doomed as those poor souls she left to rot in jail...

The headlights went off.

"Shit", she whispered, desperately trying to distinguish any shape, any silhouette in the forest, in vain.

Her breathing was now heavy and quick. Her eyes flew from a side to another in the deathly quiet road. Her hands were firmly gripping the steering wheel. One hellish minute had passed when a weak spot of light on the distance called her attention.

It was a little yellow dot on the end of the road to the right that reminded the girl of the colorful neon lights on the streets of Chicago. It seemed to be moving a bit, as if it had a mind of its own, but she couldn't tell if that was the case or if it was an illusion caused by the distance.

Kali left the car without even closing the door. Even walking had become challenging. It felt like an invisible force would try to crawl

towards her legs and grab her feet at any moment now. She tried to leave the irrational fear aside and just focus on the light, whatever it was.

She inhaled deeply, trying to remain calm. A light source was an almost certain evidence of human presence and if there was a person in the road, she could easily manipulate them.

"Hello?", she called.

No one answered, but the light now definitely moved a bit.

"Can you help me? My car just broke down and I'm trying to find my way to the town", she spoke in her most deceptively innocent voice.

The light was still moving in the distance, hovering in the darkness. It swung from a side to another like a Jack o' lantern hanging in a pole in Halloween. Kali looked back at the vehicle, but she couldn't even see it in the dark. Going back wasn't an option anymore. All that was left to be done was investigating the light.

She exhaled, wishing she hadn't left her pistol in the glove compartment.

Although she was walking, it felt like she wasn't making any progress at all. Nothing around seemed to change. Her only reference point she had was the tiny light at the very end of the street, which seemed to be getting further away instead of closer.

Finally, she realized that she was approaching it.

The yellow light was stronger than she imagine. From far away, it seemed to be just slightly luminescent, barely able to light up its surroundings. Now, she realized that it was almost as strong as a campfire, though it wasn't bright orange like a flame. She still couldn't see exactly what it was, since it was behind a bush.

A deep growl made the girl stop walking and gasp. That surely wasn't good. Maybe it was a camper who had left their dog taking care of the tents. Yeah, they could have left a flashlight on so they would know where to come back to. But if so, why would someone set a camp right there, on the side of the road? She wasn't sure if she could

manipulate dogs easily.

Her concern quickly turned into panic when the light got up from the floor and stood on two legs. Horror was visible in her face lit up by the vivid yellow light when she watched it as it moved. It wasn't a flashlight or a fire.

It was alive.

The light came from two yellow stripes on an animal's sides. It was almost as if those patches of its skin were transparent and the light emanated from inside its body. Aside from the stripes, the rest of the creature was white as paper. Reaching ten feet tall on its two legs, it had reptilian limbs with long claws on their ends. The arms, which were now four feet above the ground, had hands that looked a lot like a human's, with the claw on each thumb bigger than the other ones. The long tail touched the ground as it stood up. The round head had a half-reptilian, half-amphibian appearance. Frills blossomed from it like horns and the lower jaw split in half when it opened its mouth to growl.

The most terrifying for Kali was acknowledging that, no matter how much she tried, she couldn't manipulate that thing with her mind images.

It had no eyes.

With a sharp fleeing instinct, the girl did not wait until it was close enough to reach her; she turned around and ran aimlessly in the darkness. While desperately hoping to stumble across her car so she could get her pistol, she could hear it running after her, shrieking in what she could only imagine to be anger. Whatever was chasing her, it was *fast*.

When the light that the monster emanated reached her, revealing part of the path ahead, she knew she was going to die, no matter how much she ran, no matter where she ran.

Kali yelled and held back bitter tears when the creature reached for her with its hand and its claws sunk deep in her left arm. Somehow, she understood that it wasn't chasing her. It didn't want to chase her.

No, it was playing with her like a cat walking around a wounded mouse. She felt like it wasn't running as fast as it could and that the awfully painful slash on her arm wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been. The more she thought about the monster that chased her down, the more she realized that she somehow felt a connection with the beast, the more she felt like the energy that emanated from within its mind was similar to hers. It felt terribly familiar.

It leapt past her.

The huge reptile landed on its four legs, as big as a car in front of the girl and it roared, making her stop. It wasn't playing anymore. With blood covering her arm and pain scattering across her body, Kali panted in exhaustion and fear as it stood up in two legs and walked closer to her. She couldn't help but give a step back at each step it took forward.

The thing opened its mouth and split its jaw open, letting a long and black tongue slide out. It was confident; it was convinced that its hunt was over.

Something else growled.

It got both the Kali's and the monster's attentions, though the girl didn't dare to look to the side, unlike the creature. The monstrous grunt sounded like bubbles floating to the surface of water at first, but then it grew into a deeper, louder and wilder roar.

Surprisingly, the monster completely ignored Kali to focus on the noise. It turned its body aside to look at the forest in search of the source of the sound, as if daring whatever was there to come out.

The dare was accepted.

A sound that could only be described as a gruesome and ear piercing screech echoed through the deserted road and a slender figure pounced on the monster's head. At first, Kali thought that it was a person, but once it reached the light, it was clear that it was another creature. It had also long arms and legs that ended in claws, but it was hard to tell if it was a biped or a quadruped, since it was hanging on its opponent neck at the moment. Instead of a face, it had five lips

that opened like a flower to reveal a vivid red mouth full of little, sharp teeth.

It furiously grabbed the glowing creature's neck and started to lacerate it with its claws, pouring a weird green blood. The larger creature reached for its attacker with its hand, but the faceless monster was just barely out of reach. Taking this opportunity, the smaller monster spread its mouth open and bit its rival's neck.

With a roar fueled by wrath and pain, the larger creature threw its aggressor aside with a swing of its neck and the faceless monster rolled on the pavement. It quickly got up and roared at its opponent. When it did, the sound was not only heard, but *felt*. The lights of Kali's car, only a few feet away from the monsters went back on and so did all other lights in the distance. She could see luminescent spots flickering on far away in the distance. She frowned. Did that thing just bring the power back on?

That didn't matter. Kali couldn't afford to stay there much longer. As soon as the fight was over, she would be the next target. She had to find somewhere to run.

Something flickered far away in the distance. It was a peaceful blue light beyond the woods. Several yellowish spots of light flickered on near it. *Windows*. It was a house. It was far, but not as far as the rest of the town. She glanced at her van and at the fighting monsters, then back at the blue light. She hesitated for a bit, but finally turned around and ran towards the house.

Next chapter Preview: Nancy's confession brings chaos to the scenario. The adults are partially relieved when one of the kids wakes up, but things aren't looking so good for the other one.

10. Chapter Nine - Mind Flayed

Something is coming. Something hungry for blood" – Michael Wheeler.

"Since when?", Hopper asked in the living room.

"Can you hear anything?", Will whispered.

"Shhh!", Max replied, pressing her ear against Will's bedroom door to try to hear the adults chatting.

There was only a candle illuminating the room, barely enough for the kids to see each other, which made Will and Lucas deeply uncomfortable.

"I... I'm not sure. I mean... The first time I had an episode was yesterday", Nancy told the chief "But I just saw Him today".

"Holy shit", Max mumbled at the mention of an episode.

"What is she saying?!", Lucas asked.

"If you guys don't shut up I swear I'm gonna steal Dustin's 'Spider Man 129' and set it on fire!", she snapped.

"You wouldn't do that", Lucas accused, narrowing his eyes.

"Does Dustin even have that comic book?!", Will questioned.

"Just shut up, okay?!", Max said, focusing once again in the other conversation.

"Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell anyone, Nancy? You know what it has done to Will, you know what it has done to us...", Jonathan said.

"He wouldn't let me!", the girl yelled so loud that even Will and Lucas, who sat on Will's bed heard it.

The lights flickered. There was a pause.

"Okay, I'm confused right now", Steve said "Who the hell is 'he'?".

Silence.

"That's how Will talked about that thing", Joyce finally spoke "He kept talking about it as if it was a person... As if it was talking to him; interacting with him".

"I still don't get it", Steve said.

"The monster that got Will last year, it talked to him, it made him into some sort of... I don't know, some sort of slave", Jonathan explained.

"...And now you're telling me it got Nancy", Steve confirmed.

There was another pause. Someone probably nodded during it, but Max couldn't tell from where she was.

"And this, uh... This *other* creature you saw, it... You said that it was fighting Will's monster", Hopper spoke and waited Nancy to confirm it.

"Yes. I think it started the fight, but He was the one who knocked down the Ferris wheel", Nancy said then added, defensively "He didn't mean to interact with our world; it wasn't his intention".

"But is it back? Is the portal open again?", the chief inquired.

"He...", Nancy struggled to speak "Yes, there are a few portals that are still open, but not for long. He's too weak to keep them open right now".

"Guys, you need to hear this", Max said.

The boys ran to the door and leaned against it to try to pay attention to whatever was left of the conversation.

"Weak?", Hopper asked.

"He lost the battle. He's weak and powerless now. He doesn't know what attacked his world. He needs our help", Nancy affirmed.

A sarcastic, high-pitched and nearly insane laugh put an end to the girl's sentence and interrupted the conversation.

"*Help?!*", Joyce asked, still sarcastically "That... That *monster* that put us through hell for two years, that tried to kill us all; it needs our help?!".

"He didn't know what he was facing! He didn't know that El was so powerful when he attacked us! He won't ever come back if we do as he says", Nancy shouted defensively.

Everyone went quiet.

"We gotta burn him out of her", Joyce said.

Chester started barking again.

"Excuse me; *WHAT?!*", Steve said.

Judging by the rough noise of wood scratching the floor, someone had abruptly gotten up from their chair, probably Nancy.

"It's the only way we can get rid of it", Jonathan said "We have to take her somewhere where is too hot for it to bear".

"But what if it kills Nancy?", Steve said.

"It won't", Joyce assured.

"No!", Nancy said "You won't burn Him out".

"Sweetie, just calm down... It'll...".

"You won't burn him again. You won't hurt him anymore!".

Nancy screamed, but the sound was quickly muffled. Someone probably had put a hand over her mouth. Now, they were all talking so loud that the kids didn't need to lean against the door anymore.

"Chief, help me...! Aw, shit! She *bit* me!", Steve said.

"Kid, sit down!", Hopper said.

"No! No! No!", she insanely shouted.

"Sweetie, look at me!", Joyce said "You can't live with this thing inside you forever, okay? We're getting it out".

"You won't burn me", she said.

Max, Will and Lucas jumped back when a loud ghostly sound was heard from the living room, followed by more screams.

"What the hell? What the hell? What the hell?" Steve yelled.

"Step back! Don't let it touch you!", Hopper said.

"Nancy? Can you hear me?! Nancy?!", Jonathan desperately spoke.

"Screw it", Max said, pulling the door open, driven by an urgent curiosity.

The three kids simultaneously went to the corridor to see a black shadow zigzagging on the living room and forcing Jonathan, Nancy, Steve and Joyce to step back. Will gasped and immediately stepped back as well. Max grabbed Lucas' hand.

The shadow was growing bigger and it moved up and down like a tentacle with a mind of its own. It surely became aware of the kids' presence in the corridor, because that's where it headed next, slithering through the floor and projecting itself towards the children.

"No!", Hopper shouted.

It would've hit Max right in the head if Lucas hadn't pushed her out of the way at the very last second. Instead, the shadow made an arch above Will's head and broke out of the house through the window at the end of the corridor, shattering it. Once outside, it went to the forest and disappeared from sight.

The lights went back on.

Chester whined and hid under the dining room table.

"Holy shit!", Max said, looking outside.

The teenagers and the adults ran to the corridor. Nancy struggled to move, standing up with Jonathan's help.

"What the hell was that?", Steve asked.

Will glared through the window.

"The Shadow Monster", his voice cracked.

"Where the hell did it go?", Hopper asked, trying to spot the shapeless monster in the night.

"It's going to find someone else", Nancy said "Someone that doesn't know about it so they won't know how to get it out".

Her voice was a hoarse whisper and she could barely stand up with Jonathan supporting her. She looked like she hadn't slept in weeks. They remained silent, eyeing each other for a few moments. After what seemed to be an eternity, Hopper sighed.

"Take these kids back to their homes, son. Their parents must be dead worried. I'm gonna call the wheelers and tell them to come and pick their kid up", he said to Steve.

Steve nodded and led Lucas and Max out of the corridor.

The teenager was at the door and the kids were already outside when he noticed the faintest of noises. He stepped back in the room and realized that the source of the sound was Mike. Max and Lucas peeked inside.

"Mhhh...", the boy grunted and moved on his chair "Mhhhhh!".

"Shit! Chief! He's waking up!"

Nancy, Jonathan, Will, Joyce and Hopper came back to the living room in a rush and witnessed the same scene Steve had just seen: Mike squirming on his chair as if having a nightmare he couldn't wake up from. No one of them really knew what to do, so by the time Nancy decided to let go of Jonathan and limp towards her brother, he already woken up.

"Eleven!", he yelled, startling everyone else in the house.

Sweat ran down his face and soaked his hair. He panted and his eyes were flying across the room as he tried to understand where he was and how he got there. He then saw the pallid little figure on the couch. Mike hastily got up and tried to run towards her, but his legs were too weak and failed to support his weight, causing him to pathetically fall to his knees in front of Jane.

"Oh, no, no, no, no!", he said "Is she okay? How long has she been like this? What happened to her? Why is there so much blood...?".

"Hey, hey!", Hopper said, walking towards the boy and putting his hand on his shoulder "Take it easy, buddy. You just woke up; you shouldn't be running up and down and spilling out questions. She's gonna be fine, she's just drained. It's the same thing that happened when she closed that damn gate. Now sit here and try to calm down, alright?".

Hopper was gesturing at the armchair, but Mike didn't bother to get up; he sat down on the very floor. There was a brief pause.

"Why is she like this?", Mike asked "She didn't use her powers".

"She did. She stopped the Ferris wheel", Lucas answered "She saved us".

"How long is it going to take for her to wake up?", the boy questioned once again.

"We *don't know!*", Hopper said "We know just as much as you do, kid".

Mike opened his mouth to make yet another question, but he gave up halfway through it and looked back at El. Her hair was messy and her skin was pale. Her breath was faint and rhythmic. Hopper was lying; it hadn't been this bad ever before. Mike just lowered his head and closed his eyes.

Will, Max and Lucas walked back inside and stood next to him. Lucas just silently put his hand on his friend's shoulder and Max remained quiet, not sure of what she should say.

She remained unconscious for another hour or so. Mike's headache got slightly better, but it was still there and it refused to go away. The kids had decided to spare him from the fact that the Shadow Monster was involved in all of that. Mike was already upset enough.

Hopper was quietly standing on a corner with his head lowered. He played with Jane's blue elastic hair band between his fingers. That very same object had belonged to Sara as well.

'C'mon kid, wake up', Hopper thought, *'God knows that I can't lose my little girl again'*.

But she didn't react. She only did move many minutes later, when she inhaled deeply and flinched as if waking up from a nightmare.

Lucas could have sworn that Mike was holding his breath the whole time and only let it go when her eyelids opened.

There was a collective sigh of relief, though no one knew for sure how well she was, but at least she was awake now.

"Hey kid", Hopper spoke, stepping closer "How you feelin'?".

Jane sat up quickly and stared Hopper for a few long seconds before looking around the room. Finally, she curled up in defense and kept staring at the chief.

"Where is Papa?", she asked.

Hopper frowned.

"Did you dream about him?", he asked "Don't worry kid. You're safe now".

She didn't seem content with the answer.

"Where is Papa?", she insisted.

The cop laughed softly.

"C'mon, El. You know he's not around anymore", he said.

Her face crumbled down to a morbid shock. She looked like she was on the brink of tears.

"Gone?", she asked.

"Yeah, you know that he's gone. He's not gonna hurt you anymore", Hopper ensured.

Mike carefully walked up to her and knelt next to her seat on the couch. She immediately flinched, which made him nervous.

"El, I um... I'm glad that you're okay. I thought I had lost you", he forced himself to display a brittle smile.

El looked at him for a few seconds, staring deep into his eyes before she spoke again. Mike would expect anything from her, anything *at all*, but he still wasn't ready for what she said next:

"Who... Who are you?".

Next chapter preview: Everyone is on edge about Eleven's condition and no one is sure of what to do. The Mind Flayer finds another, more dangerous host.

11. Chapter Ten - The Hurricane

I can't lose you again"

"You won't" – Michael Wheeler and Jane Hopper.

The heavy silence fell upon the room once again. Joyce let out a sorrowful gasp and Hopper closed his eyes and stepped back. Mike flinched in surprise and looked at her in complete shock.

"I-it's me, El", he said "It's Mike".

She only stared at him, except that, unlike less than an hour before, when they cuddled in the Ferris wheel, she was scared of him. The realization suddenly came to him and it felt almost wrong to say it out loud.

"You don't remember me?", he asked.

Much to his horror, she shook her head. Mike looked at Hopper in search of an explanation, which he didn't provide.

"H-how about me, sweetie?", Joyce asked, motherly approaching the girl "Do you know who I am? You saved Will's life a while ago. You saved my boy".

El stared at Joyce in fear and confusion.

"How about us, El?", Lucas asked from where he, Will and Max stood "You've been our friend for over a year now. We've seen you doing some pretty cool stuff".

"F-friend?", El asked.

"Oh, no...", Hopper mumbled.

Mike lowered his head and started weeping. He didn't even try to hide it. His head was still aching from the fall and every sob made the pain feel worse, but he couldn't stop it. Jane was gone. El was gone. The girl who loved him was gone. Now she was 011 again; the

frightened girl that knew nothing but fear. Nancy started crying as well and Lucas saw a tear sliding down Will's face.

"What happened to her?", Mike asked, trying to wipe his tears.

No one answered.

"What happened to her?!", the boy yelled, startling the girl.

"Shit, I don't know!", Hopper shouted back.

"How can you not know?! You were there the whole time! You saw what happened!", Mike spoke, getting up from the floor.

"What am I supposed to know?!", the chief said.

"Something! *Anything!*", the boy yelled.

"Alright", Hopper said with a shaky, though very angry voice "You wanna hear what I know? She steps into that ride with you. Next thing I know, she's unconscious!".

El tried to push herself away from Hopper and Mike, but she was already in the very edge of the couch. Her breathing was beyond fast and she looked around like there were monsters in the house with her.

"Stop it, you're scaring her!", Max yelled.

Mike and Hopper halted. Everyone turned their attention to the girl. Once the boy and the chief stopped arguing, she walked to the couch and knelt next to Eleven.

"El, do you remember me?", she firmly asked.

The other girl flinched and shook her head.

"Well, my name's Maxine. You can call me Max", she spoke "We didn't really like each other, but... But today you saved my life and I'm really thankful for that".

Eleven seemed a bit less tense now. Everyone immediately

understood what Max was doing. She wasn't trying to force Eleven's back inside her head, but accepting that she had lost her identity and trying to explain as much as she could like it was the first time they ever met.

"M-Max", El said.

"Yeah, you can call me that", Max smiled "Now, El, what's the last thing you remember?".

"Bad...", Eleven said.

Max's smile disappeared.

"Bad? Those bad men at the lab?", Max continued.

Eleven nodded.

The red-headed girl sighed.

"Well, what were they doing?".

"The Bathtub", El said "They made me touch it".

Max frowned.

"...What did they make you touch?".

"The monster", Eleven replied "And it got out".

"That was almost two years ago", Mike said in disbelief "The last thing she remember is opening the gate".

El glared at Mike and then back at Max, giving her an interrogative stare. The redheaded girl decided to change the subject to ease the tension.

"Um... Well, that's our friend Mike, by the way. He really likes you", Max said and saw the boy blushing "Those are Lucas and Will, they're also our friends".

"What... Is friend?", El asked.

"Friend is...", Max tried to find the right words "Is someone you'd do anything for. You can trust them and they are always there for you. We can protect each other and... Like you always say, friends don't lie".

"Friend", Eleven repeated that word, experimenting how it felt in her lips.

It seemed like a familiar word for her, but she couldn't tell why. It just felt like it wasn't the first time she heard it. She looked at Hopper and Max followed her eyes.

"That's the chief, Hopper. He's your dad", Max explained.

"Like Papa?", El inquired.

"No, not like him. Hopper, he... He won't hurt you or make you use your powers all the time. He will actually take care of you".

El looked at the teenagers and Joyce.

"Those are Steve, Nancy, Jonathan and Mrs. Byers", Max told "I'm not sure what to tell you about them, we don't see them often".

Eleven remained in silence, absorbing the information she had just heard. Mike stepped forward.

"Eleven, you don't know what happened, do you?", he said.

She shook her head. He sighed.

"You, um... You just saved our lives... *Again...* And you probably hit your head really hard or something, because you, um... You lost yo...".

"Alright! Alright", Hopper said, keeping Mike from finishing the sentence "Can I have a word with you for a second?".

He pulled the boy by his arm and walked to a remote corner of the room.

"Why are you doing this? What did I do now?!", Mike protested.

"Listen here, kid. She's really messed up now and telling her that she just lost her memories will just make things worse. The best we can do now is calm down and hope that her memory comes back", the chief spoke.

As expected, Mike snapped.

"Are you kidding me?! *Wait?!* That's your plan?!".

"No, it's just out only option!", Hopper affirmed.

"I call *bullshit* on this option!", Mike yelled.

Steve rolled his eyes. *'Like sister, like brother', he thought.* He eyed the girl on the couch once more and frowned in concern. He had been told that two things kept El from bursting into a murdering rampage: Her emotional bonds and the imminent threat of being discovered. She had just forgotten both of those things, which is why the teenager immediately stepped back when she lowered her head and stared at the boy and the chief.

"Stop it!", she yelled.

Mike and Hopper were thrown against a wall and both hit their shoulders. Luckily, Mike didn't ram his head against the wood; that would've been infinitely more painful. By the time the chief and the boy were getting up, the whole room was dead quiet. No one could really believe what they had just witnessed. Jane had thrown Hopper and Mike, her favorite people on Earth, against a wall. She still gave them a furious look.

"Holy shit", Lucas said and he and Will ran towards Mike to make sure he was okay.

Steve rushed towards the cop and tried to help him to get up, but Hopper refused with a gesture and got up on his own, groaning as he stretched his knees. Max looked back at Eleven.

"El, no! They're your friends!", she said.

Eleven just looked at Max and then at Hopper and Mike with a blank expression. The other girl immediately remembered the story that

Lucas had told her in the Ferris wheel and she did not believe it until just then.

As if to make things even more chaotic, the distinct hum of an engine denounced that a car had just parked in front of the house, drawing everyone's attention and making Eleven flinch. They all were dead quiet, not sure of how to react to a strange presence at that time, but they all were relieved when the doorbell rang and a familiar voice started spilling out words.

"Joyce? Are you home? What the hell is going on? Do you know where Michael is? Ted and I went to the fair, but the boys weren't there, there was just... Oh, God, Joyce, answer the door!", Mrs. Wheeler said.

Steve confusedly lifted and eyebrow.

"What the...? I told your mom that you'd be home by...", he checked his watch and widened his eyes "Oh, boy..."

"No, no, no, no!", Mike said "I can't leave yet, Eleven might...".

"Yeah, you can't do much about it now, my friend", Steve said "The best you can do right now is explaining to your mom what the hell you've been up to".

"No, Steve, please, let me stay here, let me stay with El!", the boy cried.

Steve walked up to the front door alone, answered it and tried not to look into Karen's and Ted's angry eyes.

"Steve...?! What...?", Karen started.

"Okay, listen... None of that was my fault and they're all safe", he told them "They got lost in the fair and Mike is freaking out about it, but he's all good, trust me".

"Why didn't you call us, son?", Ted Wheeler asked in a monotonous tone.

"The power went down...?", Steve replied.

Ted looked at his wife in confusion and then it clicked to him.

"Oh, right. It did".

"Just let me take Mich...", Karen said, walking in.

"Who-who-whoa", the teenager said, stepping to the side and blocking Mrs. Wheeler's way so she wouldn't look at the bloody and confused mess that was Jane Hopper "You don't need to come in, it's all a mess in there and Mrs. Byers barely started cleaning it up...".

"Oh, I didn't realize...", Karen peeked inside "Is that Hopper?".

"Yep, but this isn't really a good time", Steve replied, trying to block Karen's view with the door "I actually shouldn't be here either. It was a bit of a last-moment choice. I should go home too. Hey, Mike, are you coming or not?!"

"No, I told you, I'm staying with El!", Mike's voice came from inside.

"Is Jane in there, too?", Karen said.

Steve smirked at Mrs. Wheeler and lifted his eyebrows almost comically.

"Just a second", he said before going back inside and closing the door "Alright, who the hell told you that you're in command?!".

"You're not in command either", Karen and Ted heard Mike replying inside.

"Let's suppose for a second that I'm not. Your freaking parents are outside! What am I supposed to tell them?", the teenager spoke.

"I don't know; tell them I'm sleeping over or someth... Ow, ow, ow!", Mike protested.

The door opened and Steve quickly pushed Mike through. While Ted didn't mind to what he had just heard, Karen seemed a bit worried.

"Was he causing any trouble?", she asked, putting her hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Nah", Steve said with the least convincing expression on his face.

Without saying anything else, the Wheelers grabbed Mike and went back to their car. Karen sent Steve and empty wave and he reciprocated the move. Soon Ted started the car and they left the Byers' house.

Steve let out a relieved sigh when the car wasn't on sight anymore and walked back inside.

"Alright, they're gone. Now what?", he said.

"Now you're to take these kids home. There's too much going on for us to handle and we can't afford to get them involved on it", Hopper replied.

Steve looked at Max and Lucas.

"You heard the man, let's go".

"No way! Didn't you see what happened?! The shadow monster, it's out there; and now Eleven...!", Lucas protested.

Max held his hand and gripped tightly.

"Lucas, we should go", she said.

Two things surprised the boy. First, she didn't call him 'Stalker' and second, she was still shaking. He glared at her and noticed the way she did not look away from his eyes. He looked back at Steve.

"W-we should go", Lucas said.

While the boy followed Steve and Max outside, he looked behind one more time to see Joyce and Hopper looking worriedly at El, who still stared at Max as if a new bond had just been built between the girls. Nancy and Jonathan stood silent. They'd have a lot more of explanation to do. Will didn't move or say anything, but somewhere deep inside, awful memories had been brought up in his mind. Lucas knew that he hadn't seen the end of that chaos yet.

"Mental", he whispered and kept walking.

The first notes of an electric guitar fluttered angrily from the tape player on top of the drawer. The room smelled like second-hand smoke, but a slight sweet scent of beer could be felt through it. The cold wind from outside blew through the curtains and somewhat helped to clean the bitter air of the place. In the music that was playing, the vocalist started singing.

It's early morning, the sun comes out. Last night was shaking; and pretty loud.

"Yeah, it was", Billy chuckled as if talking back to the vocalist "It was, buddy".

The teenager had picked that night to work out as he blasted his music as loud as possible. With his sister hanging out with those weird middle-schoolers she called her friends and his dad out along with her mother, there was finally no one else around to bother him, to tell him what to. That being said, limits were not a word to be used that night. That was what he pictured as a perfect weekend.

My cat is purring, it scratches my skin; so what is wrong with another sin?

Not to mention the party the previous day. Hawkins could feel like hell to Billy, but he knew how to throw a party and he had to admit it. Last night had been wilder than usual. Literally no one had gotten out of it sober. The teenager could barely remember it, but he was pretty sure that a guy there was dared to drink gasoline. The best thing was, due to being unable to drive home, Billy convinced the host of the party to let him stay at her house. Next thing he knows, he wakes up in her bed in the following morning.

The bitch is hungry, she needs to tell. So give her inches and feed her well.

Damn, it felt good to be him.

Billy took another drag of his cigarette before letting go of his weight to make a quick pause on the exercise. He got up from his bed, cracked open a can of beer and walked up to the window to exhale

the smoke outside. There were no cars to be seen around, except for the parked cars around the street. His family still was hours away from arriving, which meant he could keep the music up for a while.

More days to come, new places to go. I've got to leave; it's time for a show.

He happily took a sip of his beer.

Here I am! Rock you like a hurryc-

All the lights went out and the tape player immediately stopped. Not even the stars were visible due to the thick blanket of clouds that hovered above Hawkins. The night was pitch black and seeing was now a challenging. Outside, the neighborhood dogs started to bark and howl.

"What the fuck?!", Billy yelled, looking around "You gotta be kidding me; this piece of shit place just went out of power?!".

As expected, the shadows did not provide an answer.

Igniting his lighter to get a slight glimpse of illumination, Billy left the room and wandered through the house. He could be the tough boy at school, the one who all girls always talked about and the one who would never lose a basketball game, but in his house, he couldn't even find a flashlight without his dad around. Well, his 'perfect little sister' had always been the responsible one, which meant that she would likely know where to find a flashlight. He grunted in frustration. That was the first time that he ever needed her and she wasn't around.

He stumbled around for many long minutes, beginning his search for a reliable light source on the living room, then moving to the bedrooms and finally finding a few candles in the kitchen. He lit one of them up with the flame of his lighter and stuck it to the kitchen table.

Once the place was barely illuminated, Billy instinctively left the house and looked around. There was not a trace of light as far as the eye could see. Some people had also left to check on what was

happening, but they knew just as much as the teenager. Hawkins had gone black and no one knew why. He went back inside.

"I swear this place just gets worse at every minute!", he yelled, slamming the door shut.

The more he thought of it, the more he understood that his only option at the moment was going to bed. It was still pretty early for that, but the teenager figured that some alcohol would help him to fall asleep. After finishing his beer, he threw the can away and went to bed. Hopefully the power would come back on before his dad arrived so he could still enjoy a few hours of his Sunday, but he wasn't counting on that. Once he lay down on his bed, it didn't take long before he fell asleep.

...ane! Here I am! Rock you like a hurricane!

Billy woke up abruptly and struggled to open his eyes. The song was playing. The lights were on; the power was back. He wasn't sure how much he did sleep for or if there was anyone else in the house. Judging by the lack of complaints about the thunderous music that blasted from his tape player, he was still alone.

Something shattered in the kitchen. The noise was so loud that Billy could hear it even with the music on. Maybe there *was* someone home after all.

"Max, what are you doing, you little shit?".

My body is burning; it starts to shout. Desire is coming, it breaks out loud.

Besides the tape player that did not stop playing the iconic song from 'Scorpions', the house was silent. Billy waited for an answer, in vain. He was about to yell a curse word when a shadow slithered from under the door.

Billy jumped back and retrieved until his back touched the wall.

Lust is in cages 'til storm breaks loose. Just have to make it with someone I choose.

The smoke quickly scattered around and reached inside the room, though there was no wind to move it. The light on the ceiling started flickering and the music got louder.

The night is calling, I have to go. The wolf is hungry, he runs to show.

"Shit, shit!", he said "What the hell?!".

No one answered.

He's licking his lips, he's ready to win on the hunt tonight for love at first sting!

The shadow slithered closer to him, getting faster at each second. It moved like it had a brain of its own, as if it was hunting the teenager.

In a blink of an eye, it flung itself towards Billy, completely blocking his vision and filling his nostrils with the scent of burnt flesh. He couldn't breathe or see; the smoke was trying to get *inside* him. It slithered inside his ears, mouth and nose. With horror, he realized that it was getting in his eyes. All he could perceive besides the unbearable feeling that something was trying to reach for his mind from inside was the loud music that refused to stop playing.

Here I am! Rock you like a hurricane! Here I am! Rock you like a hurricane!

Blindly swinging his arms at the cloud of black specs like a swarm of insects, Billy stumbled on a chair and fell to the ground, where he was unable to fight the shadow. He couldn't inhale anymore and his eyes felt sore. In the teenager's mind, he was going to die right there, without even knowing what was happening.

But then it stopped.

Widening his eyes and taking a deep gasp of air, involuntarily kicking his legs behind and reaching forward with his arms as if he was drowning and tried to swim to the surface.

A relieving moment went by with nothing but the song playing on the background, shooting out fast and sharp notes of a guitar solo.

Panting, Billy quietly got up and looked around. It was gone; his room was empty. Not only that, his breathing was now normal and his eyes didn't hurt anymore. It was like the shadow had never been there. He turned the tape player off.

When did his room get so warm?

Billy didn't take long to realize that the air itself felt scorching and quickly took his shirt off, hoping to cool down, but the heat just kept getting more and more intense at each second. He ran into the bathroom, turned the tap on and hastily washed his face, rubbing his eyes with his palms as he tried to ease the warmth. It seemed to work. The air got moister and colder.

But when he opened his eyes, he realized that the air wasn't the only thing that felt different. He jumped back when he looked up to the mirror to see no reflection, but a bunch of black roots tangling up on each other and obstructing the whole wall. They covered every surface like vines. A thin layer of dust floated in the air and the only illumination came from a ghostly red light outside.

As if the horrifying sight of this new twisted world wasn't enough to frighten the teenager, dozens of flashes invaded his mind. Disgusting-looking holes in trees from which a shy red light slithered through, crumbled down tunnels with dead roots, quadruped creatures without faces and an absolutely huge shadow hovering above the clouds. They all disappeared just as fast as they made their way into his mind, but he wouldn't ever forget them, like pictures shown to him to prove that this nightmarish dimension was real.

"This isn't happening, this isn't happening, this isn't happening... This isn't! Happening!", he yelled in a fear-fueled anger.

The flashes did not stop. A loud hiss echoed in his head.

"Fuck this! Get out of my head!", he shouted, trying to cover his ears.

The hiss got louder.

"Get the hell out of here!", he got up and yelled.

The mirror in front of him shattered. The wall crumbled down.

Petrified, Billy jumped back, feeling a sharp pain on the back of his head. His nose bled.

He looked around, trying to acknowledge what made the tiles in the wall break apart until he realized that he was the source of the energy. The hissing stopped. Billy could feel that he was doing what that force wanted.

He wanted to do it, too.

With a single twitch of his neck, he ripped the door off the wall next to him and it hit the corridor floor with a muffled thump. The pain on his head had gotten worse, but it was still bearable. Billy grinned and let out a scream as he unleashed this new energy on everything on his sight,

Breaking everything around in a wild frenzy, he laughed like a maniac. Soon, the bathroom was just a pile of rubble. He had received a power he could not even begin to believe that was possible, a power that came from this mysterious source that showed him all of those images on the back of his head.

It did not give away those abilities for no reason... No... 'He' wanted something in return. 'He' wanted Billy's help with a couple things, starting with getting rid of Max and her creepy little friends. That would be a pleasure to the teenager. After he was done, he could use that new skill for personal purposes.

The world flashed and everything went back to normal. Nothing was broken anymore, but his powers were still there. Billy looked at the mirror again, his face bloody and his skin pale. Some of his veins were pitch black. He grinned.

He had never felt so powerful, so capable of fighting back all of his problems. And that was exactly what he planned on doing.

Next chapter preview: Steve finds out that someone broke into his house during the night. Brenner and his agents keep making progress on their research.